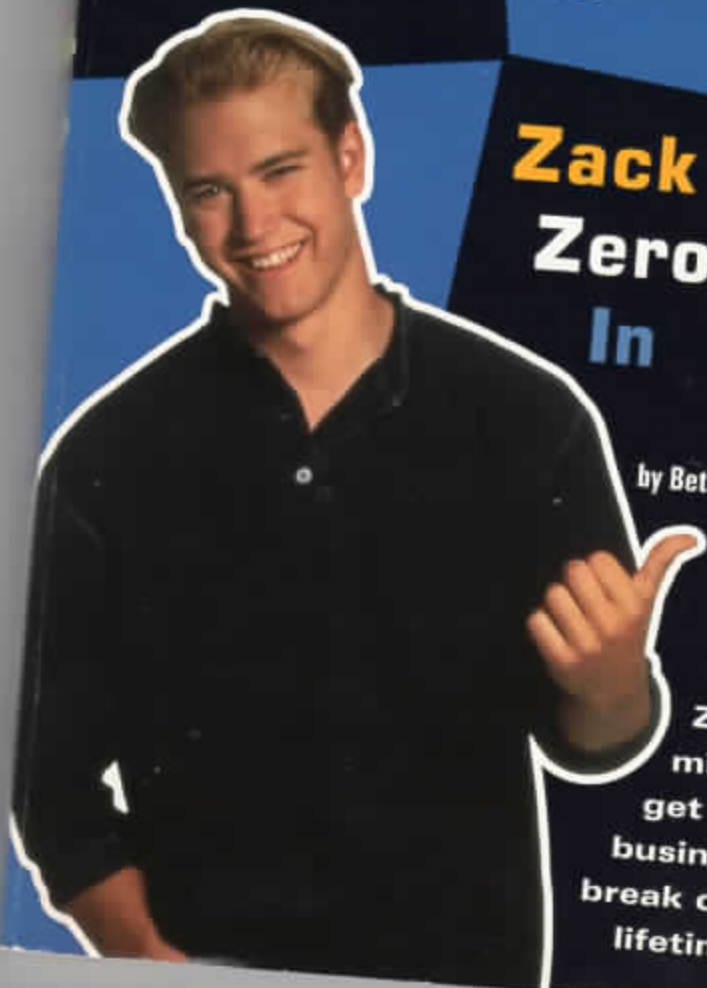


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**Zack
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Zack Zeroes In

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chapter

1

Seeing a musical from the 1940s wasn't exactly Zack Morris's idea of a great first date. He preferred horror movies—there was a better chance of hand-holding, arm-clinging, or just general contact when the maniac went bananas. Still, any kind of romantic rendezvous with beautiful Leslie Burke was a primo accomplishment.

Zack snuck a look at the pretty blond sitting next to him and smiled self-confidently. No woman could resist him for long. After all, he was a great-looking guy. Blond hair, laughing hazel eyes. A perfect match for Leslie, except for one thing: They were suitemates. And the very first week of their freshman year at California University, Leslie had told him she didn't think it was a good idea for them to date. Living under the same roof might cause trouble.

But here they were. Together. So what if the date had come about because Leslie needed to see this movie for her film studies class and didn't want to go alone? *A date's a date*, Zack thought.

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They were seeing *Meet Me in St. Louis*, a classic old movie about a family living in Missouri at the turn of the century. Zack recognized the star, Judy Garland, from *The Wizard of Oz*. In fact, he was thinking about making a crack about Dorothy not being in Oz, or Kansas, anymore. St. Louis *was* in Missouri, right? But another look at Leslie's absorbed expression changed his mind. Instead, he leaned back and glanced around the theater.

The Roxy Movie Theater was built in the late 1930s. Owned by a retired character actor who'd put tons of money into it, the old-fashioned theater—complete with chandeliers, tasseled curtains, and a full stage for the screen—played only classic films. And because ticket prices here were a couple of bucks less than those at the multiplex in the local mall, the Roxy was a favorite place to go on a date.

Zack had heard about the Roxy. In fact, he knew all the dating hot spots at Cal U. But Leslie had filled him in on the theater's history. She was a nut for historical places, and since *Meet Me in St. Louis* was playing here, she nixed the idea of renting the video, thinking she'd get the complete experience.

Zack was interested in a complete experience, too—namely, Leslie Burke—so he volunteered to come along as her date. Okay, so it wasn't a *real* date. But the possibility of putting his arm around Leslie's shoulders and making the big move in a dark theater sure beat studying for Anthropology 101.

Zack moved in a little closer, but Leslie didn't

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notice. Her eyes never even left the screen. Occasionally, she'd whisper something to Zack about the customs and etiquette of the time period. And Zack would nod his head while he planned out his next romantic move. *Now!* Zack thought, watching Judy Garland kiss her on-screen boyfriend. It was the perfect time.

He leaned over the armrest. But before he could do anything, Leslie turned to him. "Did I mention that *beau* means . . ." She stopped when she noticed that Zack's face was only an inch away.

"Boyfriend?" Zack said quietly, finishing her sentence as he flashed a grin.

Leslie hesitated, then turned back to the screen. "Shhh! There's going to be another song!" She reached for her knapsack and began to fumble around inside it.

Zack slumped in his seat and munched on the last of his stale popcorn.

"There!" said Leslie, pulling out a pad and pen.

Nuts! She was actually taking notes. A romantic movie, ha! They'd have been better off going to a hockey game!

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"The clothes they wore!" Leslie exclaimed as they came out of the theater. "I can't imagine wearing dresses down to my ankles with collars up to my chin."

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"Me, either," Zack said, giving her an appraising glance. "I can imagine you in other things, though."

"Like what?" Leslie challenged, an edge in her voice.

"Uh, jeans, T-shirts." Or a bikini, he mused.

"Oh." Suddenly, Leslie was spinning around, arms extended like a joyous Judy Garland. "High society. Impeccable manners. Fathers who kept their families happy. Mothers who stayed home. Those charming old trolley cars they used to ride. And what about the boy next door! Call me old-fashioned, but I could sure get used to that way of life. Imagine living in one of those big, old, Victorian houses! Aren't they wonderful?" She went dancing across the intersection toward campus. "I could really see myself living like that. Couldn't you?"

Zack dodged a guy on a mountain bike, then hurried to catch up to Leslie. "Imagine is about all I could do," he said, turning around to give the biker a dirty look. "The houses we saw in that movie are the kind you find in the best part of San Francisco, Les. Have you checked real estate prices lately? They're on the moon!"

When Leslie turned and looked away, Zack realized he'd said the wrong thing. Leslie Burke did *not* like talking about finances, probably because the name Burke was synonymous with big bucks at Cal U. There was Burke Hall, the Burke Endowment,

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and his suite's very own Burke Foundation. Used only in times of dire need, it was otherwise known as Leslie's allowance.

And who could forget the delicate matter of Phil Skylark? Good old Phil, the scheming senior who'd tried to get close to Leslie in an attempt to get even closer to her father—and his millions.

"Buy you a soda?" Zack offered. "I mean, I'm not your 'beau,' but I *am* the boy next door." He bent at the waist, pretending to doff an imaginary hat as he offered her his arm. "We could head over to the Falcon's Nest."

"But, sir," Leslie said, her blue eyes twinkling. "I scarcely know you, and we have no chaperone!"

"Do I look like a cad who would try to have his way with you?" Zack twirled an invisible mustache. "Don't answer that!" he added quickly.

Without another word, Leslie smiled and took his arm.

□ □ □

When Zack and Leslie came through the door of the gang's favorite hangout, they were chatting away about the movie.

"Shhh!!!"

The insistent whisper came from Alex Tabor, who was sitting with A. C. Slater at a table right near the door. Alex's curly auburn hair fell across the thick book she was studying, her back was ramrod

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straight, and her serious expression shouted "drama time!"

Slater shot them an apologetic look. "Alex is trying out a theater piece," he explained, "and I'm her guinea pig."

"Well, since we're here to pig out, we'll join you," Zack said, leading Leslie toward the table. "We just saw a great mov—"

"Shhh!!!" Alex commanded again. "I'm *working*, Zack!"

Zack looked at Slater, who shrugged his big, muscular shoulders helplessly.

Slater was crazy about Alex; they'd been a couple since the first week of school. But he still found it hard to believe they were suitemates, too—Slater rooming with Zack and Screech, their buddy from Bayside High, in one room, and Alex, Leslie, and Kelly Kapowski, another high school friend, in the other. Slater thought he must be the luckiest guy around—except when Alex was wrapped up in a role, that is. Then, nothing went smoothly, and sitting through dramatic readings wasn't exactly Slater's style. He preferred a good wrestling match.

Queenlike, Alex regarded her expanded audience with a disdainful eye, then looked back at her book. She scanned a page, then set it aside. "Okay, one more time." Slater let loose an agonized groan.

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"Look, Slater, if you don't want to hear this . . ."

"It's okay! If I can watch *The Terminator* twenty-five times, why can't I do the scene with you over and over, too?" Slater gazed at her with warm brown eyes, and Alex melted just a bit.

"Okay," she said. "Here goes."

For a moment, Alex was silent, trying to get a feel for the character. Then she smiled primly and began reciting: "I am almost a whole day old, now. I arrived yesterday."

Zack couldn't resist. "Gee, Alex," he said with a grin. "You do act like a big baby, but I never thought you'd admit it."

With an evil look in her eyes, Alex picked up her book and aimed.

"Hey, hey, hey!" said Slater, coaxing the book out of Alex's hands. "Alex is a little edgy. She's been trying to get this right all night. She has an important audition coming up."

"An audition?" Leslie asked, surprised. "You haven't said a thing about it, Alex."

Alex blushed. "I didn't want to jinx it."

"Telling your roommates would jinx you?" said Leslie, sounding a little hurt.

"No, no! It's just a theater thing. A superstition. I'm auditioning for Conrad Lerner. You know, the Hollywood director? He graduated from here, and he's doing a play for the drama department." Alex

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picked up the book. "I chose this monologue from a story we studied in English lit. I figured he's never heard of it."

Leslie took a closer look at the title. "'Eve's Diary' by Mark Twain? If Lerner went to school here, what makes you think he didn't study this same story?"

Alex paled. "I never thought of that," she admitted.

"What difference does it make?" Slater said, interrupting. "The whole thing is a monologue, so it's perfect for Alex. Eve never stops talking."

"Slater!" Alex cried.

Slater continued unabashed. "Lerner already said there's no part for her in the school show. But he might put her in the next film he's directing. Alex Tabor, *movie star*. Can you stand it?"

"Outrageous!" said Zack. "What's the movie?"

"It's a remake," Alex volunteered quickly, then gave Slater a stare that said *silence!* "A remake of an old movie you probably never heard of."

"I love old movies!" said Leslie. "I must have seen the original. Come on, Alex. What is it?"

Alex gulped. "It's called *I Walked with Zombies*."

Leslie was silent.

"But it's gonna be a really *good* remake!" Alex insisted.

■ ■ ■

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"I am the walking dead," Zack said in a deep, spooky voice. He lumbered down the street with outstretched arms and heavy, thudding steps. "I am a zombie."

Zack, Leslie, Slater, and Alex were heading back to the suite, and Zack couldn't resist teasing Alex about the horror movie.

"That isn't funny, Zack!" Alex said, giving him a little shove.

"Zack the zombie at your zervice." Zack ignored her, continuing his zombie walk, but picking up the pace.

"I said quit it!" Alex sped up, too.

"Care to see my final resting place?" Zack asked, breaking into a run.

Alex took off after him, but Zack made it to the common room first, seconds ahead of her.

"Hi, guys!" Zack said casually, his back to the suite door so Alex couldn't get through. Samuel "Screech" Powers, a beanpole with curly hair and a wacky, scientific mind, was sitting at his computer. Kelly Kapowski and Mike Rogers, an ex-NFL football player and their dorm's resident assistant, were huddled around him.

"You've had it, Zack!" came Alex's muffled shout as she tried to push her way inside.

"Who's that?" Mike demanded in his "official" voice.

"Would you believe, a zombie?"

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"Sounds more like Alex," Kelly said. She raised an all-knowing eyebrow. "What did you do *this* time, Zack?" Kelly had been Zack's high school sweetheart and was wise to his scheming ways.

Before Zack could answer, Alex burst into the room, sending Zack sprawling. Slater and Leslie rushed in behind them, while Zack slowly rose to his feet.

"You cannot hurt a zombie," he said zombielike, swinging his arms woodenly. "We are already dead."

Alex's scowl dissolved into a laugh. "You look *sooooo* ridiculous!"

Zack shrugged his shoulders. "Well, then I guess I'll stop," he said in his normal voice. He looked over at the computer screen.

"So what's going on here?" he asked, moving closer for a better view of the numbers and coded abbreviations. "You guys look like you're planning a revolution."

Screech swiveled in his chair to face Zack and wound up spinning around twice. "Oops," he said. "Don't know my own strength."

Zack grinned at his rail-thin friend. Screech looked as if he'd have trouble lifting a dinner bell, much less a barbell.

"Anyway," Screech was saying, "I'm showing Mike and Kelly that by combining the Elliot wave theory of economic forecasts and a program I downloaded from a computer bulletin board it's possible

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to manipulate Mike's investments to evolve over the next year with a maximum degree of return."

"Say that again in English," Zack said, looking confused.

"Screech was just showing me how I could improve my financial portfolio," Mike explained.

"It's so fascinating I'm thinking of majoring in economics," Kelly added, her blue eyes wide with interest.

"Well, we were just finishing up," Mike said, getting to his feet and heading toward the door. "I'll see you guys later."

"I should say good-night, too. We're giving flu shots at the health center early in the morning," Kelly said, gathering up some odds and ends.

"And I have to get my beauty sleep to look my best for my audition." Alex gave Slater a lingering kiss on the lips, then followed Kelly into the bedroom.

"Man, she sure knows how to make an exit," Slater said, gazing after her. Then he turned his attention to Screech's computer program. "Since when did you become a Wall Street genius, Screech?"

Screech shrugged modestly. "This is all basic stuff. I got the information off a bulletin board—you know, data from another computer system, via a modem and the phone? It's pretty simple for us high-tech types."

Slater nodded absently, not really paying much attention. "I'll see you in the morning," he said, heading for the door to his room.

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Mike, Kelly, Alex, and Slater—four down, Zack thought. Now if Screech would just pack it in, he would be alone with Leslie.

"Anyone for watching Letterman?" Screech asked, reaching for the remote control.

"Don't you need your beauty rest, too?" Zack said, giving him a look.

"Well, actually, I . . ." Screech glanced at Zack, saw him shake his head, and trailed off. "Winken, Blinken, and Nod, here I come!" he declared, switching off the computer.

At last! Zack thought. He and Leslie were alone in the common room. Zack sat down on the couch and patted the cushion next to him. Leslie smiled sweetly as she came over, but she still left plenty of room between them.

"Zack," she said quietly, "there's something I've been meaning to say to you all evening."

Zack edged closer. "I know, I know. You want a big house and high society and a guy who takes care of everything just like in the movie. I've been thinking very seriously about it." He edged even closer.

"Well, yes, but . . ." Leslie wasn't really listening. She had something on her mind, and she wanted to tell Zack what it was.

Zack took advantage of her confused look to move even closer. But Leslie put a hand on his chest, halting his forward progress. "My parents are coming tomorrow. They want to see the homecom-

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ing football game this weekend, and they want to meet all my suitemates. I haven't told anyone yet because you know how awkward I feel about their influence around here. I didn't want anyone to make it a big deal. . . ."

"Glad we got that out of the way," Zack yawned, stretched, and put his arm around Leslie's shoulders. "So what if we . . ."

Leslie stood up, then bent down to give him a quick kiss on the cheek. "I had a really nice time tonight," she said, walking toward her room. "Thanks."

Zack was stunned. Rejected! Zack Morris, rejected! What had he done wrong? As Leslie disappeared into her room, Zack searched his brain for a reason. Maybe Leslie thought he couldn't give her the things she wanted . . . the house . . . the society . . . the life.

That had to be it! Zack leaned back on the couch, putting his arms behind his head. After all, what woman could resist his incredible charm? Leslie didn't know it, but Zack "scheming is my middle name" Morris could do anything he set his mind to. And he had set his mind to winning over one Leslie Burke.

chapter

2

Zack Morris, wearing an old-fashioned overcoat and reading a St. Louis newspaper dated September 1902, was riding the trolley car on his way home from work. He pulled the bell for his stop, got off, and crossed the tracks to his home—a big, Victorian mansion.

"Honey, I'm home," he called, opening the door. "Leslie?"

Zack paused a moment in the living room, admiring the floor-to-ceiling painting—a portrait of his beautiful wife, Leslie, and their five lovely daughters. *Five daughters?* Oh, well. One must be ready for the surprises in life. But where was everybody? After a hard day at the office, Zack liked to relax, surrounded by his loved ones.

Zack turned as the door burst open. Could that be his loved ones coming in now? No, it was a crew of wild-haired cleaning ladies, swinging their brooms about frantically. Zack blinked. The cleaning ladies looked suspiciously like Kelly Kapowski, Alex Tabor, and . . . Leslie Burke! But . . .

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"Get a move on!" the ladies shouted in unison. "Look alive!" They charged toward him, brooms churning up dust.

"You can't invade my turn-of-the-century home like this!" Zack shouted, waving his newspaper. "Don't you realize who pays your salary!?"

"Turn of the what?" Leslie asked quizzically. "Zack, get with it. My parents will be here any minute!"

How dare the cleaning staff address him so familiarly! Then, suddenly, the scene shifted. There above him, in her bathrobe, was Leslie—not cleaning lady Leslie, but suitemate Leslie. She was trying to wake him up. With a groan, Zack sat up in his bed. Screech and Slater were already rushing around the room, putting away clothes, books, and the rest of their usual mess.

"Sorry, Zack, but I told you last night, remember?" Leslie hurried out of the room, followed quickly by Kelly and Alex.

Zack stretched and shook the last images of the dream from his head. Screech and Slater, arms full of stuff, looked as sleepy as he felt, and equally frustrated.

"Guys, guys!" Zack implored. "There's an easier way."

■ ■ ■

"I must say," Walter Burke announced an hour later, "kids today are a great deal neater than they

were in my time." He brushed a gray hair off the collar of his camel hair sportcoat. "Wouldn't you say so, Marge?"

"Judging from this suite, I'd have to agree." His wife, Margaret Burke, smiled. "Maybe Leslie's friends could come to our house and give us a few tips?"

"Oh, Mother, really," Leslie said, laughing. "Don't jump to conclusions before you see the guys' room."

"Yeah," Alex agreed. "You know what slob guys can be." She glanced at Mr. Burke and blushed. "Well, some guys."

"Not us guys," Zack said, flashing a grin at the Burkes as Mr. Burke stepped into the guys' room. Seeing Leslie stand beside her mom was encouraging. If you could really tell how a girl would age by looking at her mother, Leslie would be winning the Mrs. America contest at age forty.

"I still don't know about this coed dorm business," Walter Burke declared as he stepped past Zack and into the guys' room. "What's the wisdom of having young women live just across the way from young men?"

Zack chuckled, then grew instantly serious when Mr. Burke shot him a look. The man was so imposing! Zack could just see him giving orders, everyone in his office jumping to attention.

Zack cleared his throat and looked at Slater, who was nervously shuffling his feet. Screech seemed to be holding his breath. Kelly hadn't said a word. Even

Usually outspoken Alex seemed cowed. Zack sensed Mr. Burke put everyone on edge. It was one thing to meet parents, but the mega-rich, mega-powerful Burkes, who had a big say about everything at U? That was downright scary.

"Okay, everything and everyone look great," Mr. Burke said in an authoritative voice. "Let's all go for breakfast steaks at Arpeggio's. On me."

Kelly started to offer a protest. After all, Arpeggio's was the most expensive restaurant in town—and money didn't exactly grow on trees. Then she remembered that this was Walter Burke, millionaire. She kept her mouth closed.

"I still can't believe how neat you men keep your room," Mr. Burke was saying as he opened the closet door. "Why, when I was—" He was interrupted by a mountain of dirty clothes, books, papers, and golf clubs that tumbled out and landed squarely on his highly polished, expensive shoes.

■ ■ ■

Zack was relieved that everyone was still laughing about the closet incident midway through breakfast. Sure, there was a hard edge to Walter Burke. But the more time Zack spent with him, the more he liked him—and Mrs. Burke, too. Besides, anything could be solved with a serious public relations campaign. The miraculous merits of Zack Morris rarely failed to impress.

"I hope the Fighting Falcons win," Mr. Burke was saying. "I didn't fly in from Bangkok to see the football team lose."

"Bangkok, sir?" Screech asked.

Mr. Burke paused, his coffee cup halfway to his mouth. "It's in Thailand, Speech."

"It's Screech, sir. And I just meant it's remarkable that you'd fly all the way from Thailand just to catch the game."

"I didn't. I came to see my little princess." He smiled at Leslie, then cast a glance at Slater, who hadn't said two words all morning. "Do you ever speak, young man?"

Slater tried to respond, but he was chewing a huge piece of the best steak he'd ever had. "Uh-huh."

"Slater was captain of the Bayside football team," Zack said, trying to get Slater off the spot. "Probably has his mind on the game, huh, A. C.?"

"Uh-huh" was all Slater could muster with his mouth full.

"You know," Screech put in, "I was checking out some statistics on a football database the other day, and—"

"Enough about football," Mr. Burke said decisively. "Marge is the pigskin nut in our family, not me."

"Well, after all, Daddy"—Leslie smiled at her mother—"she *was* head cheerleader for Cal U."

"Now, dear," Mrs. Burke told her daughter. "You know golf is the only game your father really cares about." She rose from her seat. "Now why don't you girls take me to that lovely odds and ends store I saw across the street? They have some things in the window that would look lovely in your room."

"Mom, I told you. No housewarming present," Leslie objected.

"I know, I know," Mrs. Burke said, nodding. "We'll just look, that's all."

Alex and Kelly eyed each other, not sure what to do. Should they agree with Leslie? Side with her mother? But when Leslie said, "All right," the three girls followed Mrs. Burke outside.

After the girls had left, Walter Burke gazed around the table. "Now, let's get back to golf. Who owns the clubs that gave me a whack back there in your room?"

Slater and Screech stared at Zack. Zack stared at his plate. A moment later, he raised a finger in the air nervously.

"Those, uh, were mine, Mr. Burke, sir. Look, I don't have much money, or any accident insurance, but I'd—"

"Nonsense! I recover easily from pain. So you play the ancient game of golf?" Mr. Burke studied Zack appraisingly.

"You should see Zack play!" Screech said enthusiastically.

siastically. "One time, he shot the ball straight through the windmill for a hole in one!"

Zack coughed. "That was miniature golf, Screech. But I do play the real thing, too. Why do you ask?"

"Well, Zack, I need someone to fill out a four-some tomorrow morning. Care to join me?"

Zack grinned. Wow! What an opportunity to get to know Leslie's father! As he tried to act nonchalant, a plan was slowly forming in his mind. Zack would win over the old guy on the golf links, and when Mr. Burke approved of him, Leslie would realize what a serious guy Zack could be—what a good provider. She'd change her mind about Zack Morris, and they'd live happily ever after.

"Why, sure," Zack answered. "I'd be honored to play golf with you, Mr. Burke."

"Call me Walter," the distinguished-looking man said, shaking Zack's hand.

"Sure thing, Walter. So who are we playing with?"

"Dean Eisenberg and Coach Saroyan."

"Fine," Zack said, trying not to choke. Screech's eyes opened wide in surprise, and Slater had actually stopped chewing. Zack Morris, scamster extraordinaire, would be playing golf with two of the most powerful men on the Cal U campus!

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That evening, the suite was in for a major surprise. After dinner, Mike Rogers was in the common room going over some stock decisions with Screech, when Kelly burst in carrying a handful of tickets. "Hey, everybody! Guess what I scored?" "Ninety-five on a pop quiz?" Screech guessed. "No! Does *Smashing Pumpkins* tell you anything?"

Mike frowned as Kelly went bouncing around the room, squealing with delight. "Smashing pumpkins? Little early for Halloween, Kel. It's not even October yet."

Just then Alex ran in, followed by Slater. "Did I hear you say Smashing Pumpkins?" she asked breathlessly.

Kelly waved her fistful of tickets. "Remember the fund-raising concert we're doing for the center? Well, not only did we raise enough money to meet our quota, but we have a special surprise band coming to play. This morning Caitlin Johnson talked to her cousin!"

"Got it!" Slater said, nodding. "Caitlin Johnson is the one whose cousin manages—"

"Ooh, this is just too good!" Alex exclaimed, interrupting. "They actually agreed to play!" She began squealing and bouncing around with Kelly.

"The Smashing Pumpkins!!" they screamed in unison.

"At a price I like!" Slater added.

"Do you believe it!" Kelly chortled. "Free tickets for everybody to see the hottest group in the country!"

"Did I hear what I think I heard?" Leslie stepped out of her room, drying her hair with a towel. Kelly thrust a pair of tickets in her face. "Unbelievable," Leslie said, her eyes wide.

As Kelly passed out the tickets, Screech grabbed a Smashing Pumpkins CD and followed Mike into the hall, trying to explain the group's music.

"Although I do prefer a rousing polka band," he said, "there is some actual merit to . . ." His voice faded away.

"Can you guys leave soon?" Kelly asked. "The show starts in just a little while."

"I'll be ready in ten minutes!" Slater said, heading for his room.

"I'll take a little longer," Alex gave Kelly a kiss on the cheek. "Thank you, roomie! This is great!"

Alex hurried into the bathroom, just as Zack came in carrying schoolbooks in one hand and a video in the other.

"Hey, guys," he said to Kelly and Leslie as he went to the kitchen.

"Zack! I got tickets for Smashing Pumpkins!" Kelly exclaimed, hurrying over to show him.

"That's great," Zack said matter-of-factly, carrying the video and a soda over to the couch. He barely gave the tickets a glance.

Why was Zack acting so disinterested? Kelly exchanged a puzzled look with Leslie.

"Are you feeling okay?" Kelly asked.

"Just great," Zack replied. He shoved his video in the VCR and took a seat on the couch. "Is there a problem?"

"The Smashing Pumpkins are your favorite group," Leslie said. "I mean, aren't they? The concert's tonight, Zack." She waved a couple of tickets in his face. "How soon can you be ready?"

Zack reached for the remote and put the video on pause. He looked up at Leslie and shook his head. "No can do, Les. I have a ton of homework. But thanks for asking."

The girls stood there, mouths open. Then Kelly shrugged and started toward her room. "Better make sure you don't have the flu," she told Zack. "You're acting totally weird."

"I feel fine, honestly," Zack told Leslie. "I just want to study."

"Well, okay," said Leslie, not altogether convinced. Zack was turning down Smashing Pumpkins *and* a date with her—just when their relationship seemed to be heading in a new direction. "I'll let you know how they are."

Zack gave her a big smile. "That would be great," he replied.

Shaking her head, Leslie followed Kelly into the girls' room. Zack waited a minute, then took the

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VCR off pause. Introductory music began to play and the title *Ten Ways to Instant Super-Golf* came on-screen.

"Hey," Zack told himself as the program got under way. "A guy's gotta do what a guy's gotta do." He took a drink of his soda, then looked around to make sure no one was coming. Carefully watching the professional golfer on the tape, he stood up and took a practice swing.

chapter 3

While everyone else was at the concert, Zack studied the golf video three times. Then he switched on Screech's computer and read through the file on the Elliot wave theory of economic forecasts. He needed something to discuss with Mr. Burke, and finance seemed a sure bet. Surprisingly, the theory seemed pretty simple. According to Elliot, the stock market had predictable waves of pessimism and optimism. Predicting waves? Being a native of southern California, Zack found that easy to understand. Playing the stock market was like . . . well, surfing.

The next morning Zack woke early and was out the door before anyone else was even up. Tee-off was at 7:00 A.M. and Zack didn't want to be late. Mr. Burke, Dean Eisenberg, and Coach Saroyan were not exactly the kind of guys you kept waiting.

At precisely 7:01, Zack walked into the clubhouse, just in time to meet up with the rest of the foursome.

"Nice to see you again, Mr. Morris," Dean Eisenberg said dryly.

Zack grinned sheepishly. Already, he'd had a few run-ins with the dean. Nothing major, but Zack knew the dean was keeping an eye on his grades—and his behavior. Here on the golf course though, they were equals.

Zack shook hands with Mr. Burke, said hello to Coach Saroyan, then twirled a golf club in the air. "Shall we begin?" he said confidently.

For much of the game, Zack managed to hold his own. Playing with good players affected his game positively. Coach Saroyan was ahead of everyone else. He was playing just about even par, using the allotted number of shots for each hole. Zack and Mr. Burke trailed him—with a dead even score—and Dean Eisenberg was two strokes behind them.

The men talked about golf, the weather, and the upcoming Cal U football game. Anything, it seemed, but finances.

What a waste of time that was, Zack thought. I could have been watching the golf video again or catching the second set of the Smashing Pumpkins concert instead of studying the Elliot wave theory. But finally, on the tee of the eighteenth hole, the conversation turned to money.

"The good old USA," Mr. Burke said, studying the fairway ahead, "better buckle down. If not, we're going to lose the big financial tournament to

other players in the business world!" With that, he gruffly smacked a 250-yard drive.

"Right on the money as usual, Walt," Dean Eisenberg said, gazing admiringly at the shot. "In more ways than one."

"Nice drive, sir!" Zack exclaimed.

Even Coach Saroyan gave a whistle.

Mr. Burke laughed. "I learned all my shots from 'Fuzzy' Joe Feller. He's the golf pro who made—"

"*Ten Ways to Instant Super-Golf*," Zack finished.

"I financed the production of that video," Mr. Burke said, his voice tinged with surprise. "You've seen it?"

"I've given it a glance or two," Zack replied slyly, preparing to hit his teed-up ball. His drive started well, but veered off in a "slice." Zack frowned as his ball landed in the rough grass off to the right side of the fairway.

Mr. Burke patted Zack on the back. "Better watch that tape again, son." Then his eyes lit up with an idea. "Want to stake a wager on this last round, Zack? We're about even, aren't we?"

Zack mentally calculated his bank account balance. *Danger, danger!* "Uh, how much did you have in mind, sir?"

"How about breakfast?"

The prices at Arpeggio's flashed through Zack's mind. *Red alert!* "You mean at Arpeggio's?" He gulped.

"No, you pick," the millionaire said with a smile. Zack let out a sigh of relief. "Okay, it's a deal," he agreed.

A look of determination crossed Mr. Burke's face as they walked to the green. "Just a word of warning, Zack. I didn't get rich by losing money."

"Whatever you say, Mr. Burke," Zack said.

"Walter, Zack. Call me Walter."

Zack nodded respectfully. "Whatever you say, Walter."

Coach Saroyan had just finished his shot, ending the game about eight strokes ahead of the others. Dean Eisenberg was lining up a long putt, hoping to make a par for the hole.

"So you haven't said anything about the school investments," Mr. Burke said to the dean. "How are they doing?"

"They're doing fine, Walter. That's why I haven't hit you up for any donations."

Mr. Burke turned to Zack. "I hope this money talk doesn't bore you," he said with a smile.

"Not at all." Zack tried to sound nonchalant. "In fact, I've been studying the Elliot wave theory of economic forecasts lately," he added just as Dean Eisenberg swung his club.

The dean stumbled a bit in surprise, and the ball missed the hole by an inch.

"What a shame, Dean," Mr. Burke said, trying to

sound sympathetic. "Looks like you don't stand a chance to beat me now."

Dean Eisenberg tapped his ball in, then plucked it out, a tight smile across his lips. "As usual, Walter."

It was Zack's turn. He studied the "line"—the pattern in the grass ahead of his ball—thinking of how competitive Walter Burke could be. And since the last thing he wanted to do was alienate the father of gorgeous Leslie Burke . . . Zack closed his eyes as he stroked his putt, planning to miss. But the ball took a surprising curve to the left. Plunk! The sound of his ball dropping into the hole brought a worried lump to Zack's throat.

"Nice putt, Zack!" exclaimed Coach Saroyan.

"Ditto!" echoed Dean Eisenberg.

"How long did you study that golf tape?" Mr. Burke said menacingly. Then he broke into a hearty laugh.

Zack tried to laugh with the others. *Obviously, not enough*, he thought.

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A little while later, Zack and Mr. Burke were saying good-bye to the dean and the coach and heading out of the clubhouse.

"So Leslie tells me you two went out on a date," Mr. Burke said.

Zack glanced at the millionaire. "Uh, yeah. You can call it that," he muttered.

"My daughter going out with a fan of the Elliot wave," Mr. Burke mused. He shook his head. "Hmm."

The entrance to the Cal U golf course was only a few blocks from the university. To Zack's surprise, Mr. Burke insisted on walking him back to campus—although he did have his chauffeur deliver Zack's golf clubs to the dorm. As they walked, Mr. Burke rambled on about what Cal U had been like during his own college years and how it was very important to him that Leslie be happy at school.

"I won't say Leslie's been sheltered," Mr. Burke said as they strolled past the administration building, autumn leaves crunching on the sidewalk under their feet. "Let's just say she's never really experienced the elements."

Zack nodded, as if he understood. "You mean she's never been, like, caught in a storm or anything?"

"*Unsavory* elements, I should have said. People who play up to you, who pretend to understand things they might not even care about. The kind of people who are after your money."

Zack swallowed hard. He nodded again—and this time he really did get the picture. *I'm not like*

those people, he told himself. *I'm not after Mr. Burke's money. I'm just after his daughter.*

"So tell me about this Elliot wave theory," Mr. Burke said, changing the subject. "Sounds interesting. I've been trying to recall if I know anything about it, but . . . Where'd you run across it, anyway?"

They turned a corner and started down the path to the central quadrangle on campus. "Well," Zack stalled, trying to come up with a good answer. He didn't want Mr. Burke to know that he'd never even heard about the Elliot wave until Screech told him about it.

Suddenly, he saw Screech himself, whistling happily and heading right toward them. Surely, if they all started talking, Screech would blurt out something. Something that would tell Mr. Burke he was the one who knew about the theory, not Zack.

"This way!" Zack said, grabbing Mr. Burke's arm and turning him 180 degrees without breaking stride.

"Huh!?"

"The, uh, restaurant where I wanted to have breakfast, Walter. I just remembered it's down this way."

They were between buildings. Zack held his breath as Screech passed behind them, his whistling uninterrupted. Whew! He hadn't noticed a thing.

Saved by the Bell

Mr. Burke, squinting his eyes, was trying to read a sign across the campus intersection. "Don Pepe's Taco Shack? Mexican food for breakfast?"

Zack looked up. He glanced from side to side. No other restaurants were in sight. Gulp!

"Uh, well . . . people in Mexico eat breakfast."

"If you recommend it, son, I'll take a chance!" Mr. Burke gave Zack a hearty clap on the back. "How could I go wrong, dining with somebody as lucky as you?"

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"When you've got a big game coming up, you've gotta study the other team's strategy," Slater told Alex. They were strolling through the horror section of Moon Toons, the giant music-and-video store near the Cal U campus. "I mean, Hollywood guys want to see your résumé, so you might as well check out their credentials, too. It's only fair."

"You're right," Alex agreed, reading from a print-out the clerk had given her. She ran a finger along a row of videos, then stopped on a title. "Here's one."

Slater took the video and looked it over. "*Bathing at the Blood Motel?* Oh, this is a real work of art," he scoffed. "Directed, of course, by Conrad Lerner. Congratulations, Conrad!"

"Hey, everybody has to start somewhere!" Alex cried. She grabbed the video and shoved it back in place.

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Slater pulled the computer list from Alex's hand and continued down the aisle. After a moment he found another video and pulled it down from the shelf. "*Evil Easter?* Oh, brother! Sounds like your buddy Conrad laid another egg . . . an Easter egg."

Slater was laughing uproariously at his own joke, but Alex wasn't joining in.

"This could be a real work of art!" she said defensively. She yanked the video out of Slater's hands.

Slater found another film directed by Lerner and read the cover description. "A thriller about a psychiatrist turned vampire, *Fangs for Your Memories*. Puh-lease!"

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Zack had never even *heard* of Don Pepe's Taco Shack, much less eaten there. He figured good luck really was on his side though, because the place was well lit, clean, and filled with customers. The coffee smelled good, and the menus looked new. As Mr. Burke sipped his coffee and glanced over a copy of the *Wall Street Journal*, Zack tore open a packet of artificial sweetener and dumped it in his coffee.

"You're so interested in finance, I bet you read these stock tables every day, huh, Zack?" Mr. Burke asked, his eyes glued to the paper.

Stock tables? What is he talking about? In his

nervousness, Zack dumped another packet of sweetener in his coffee. Then another. And another.

"Like it rather sweet, don't you?" Mr. Burke asked, his gaze traveling from Zack's cup to Zack's face.

"What? Oh, yeah!" Zack said quickly, noticing what he'd done. He poured a few containers of half and half into his cup and stirred it all together. Then he took a swallow of the sickeningly sweet brew and tried not to gag. "Mmm, good."

The millionaire shook his head. He set down his own cup, folded open a section of the *Journal*, then placed it to the side. "Now, how about that Elliot wave stuff? You never really got around to answering my question."

"Well, uh, it's kind of simple," Zack began, his brain kicking into gear. "Some guy back in the thirties figured out that, you know, people's moods change. They go up and they go down." He paused to plot his next statement. Mr. Burke sat there, silent and still. "So, uh . . . if you apply the principle to the stock market and figure the same kind of patterns repeat, it helps you predict. The trick is, uh, catching a wave when it comes along."

"I see," Mr. Burke said slowly. "So you're telling me it's like . . . surfing?"

Zack nodded. He started to sip his coffee, then

decided against it. Instead, he reached for his napkin, wishing he could mop his forehead. He was sure he was sweating bullets. Was Mr. Burke falling for his act?

"Fascinating!" Mr. Burke said after what seemed like an eternity. He pushed the *Journal* in front of Zack and pointed to a line in the stock tables. "Cascade Can common stock, 37%. Where's it going?"

Zack grinned. Actually it was more like grinding his teeth together, but he hoped it looked like a smile. "Up?" he peeped.

The millionaire frowned. He studied the numbers, then looked at Zack, who was busily tearing his napkin into little pieces.

Mr. Burke slowly nodded his head. "By golly, I think there might be something to this theory of yours." He thrust the paper at Zack. "Tell me more, young Mr. Morris."

Luckily, Mr. Burke was struck by a sudden idea, so Zack was saved from answering. "Sometimes I hire summer interns from Cal U," Mr. Burke told Zack. "I wonder if you'd be interested. The interns do get paid a handsome salary."

"They do?" Zack squeaked, his voice suddenly going haywire.

"If they prove to me they've got a good business head on their shoulders, that is. So tell me more about your economic theories, Zack."

Zack sat there, stunned. A summer internship with Walter Burke? Wow! That could lead to bigger and better things. It was money in the bank . . . a down payment on a Victorian home . . . an investment in his future with Leslie.

Then he remembered how Mr. Burke felt about those "unsavory elements." And here he was, pretending he knew all about business and economic theories and the *Wall Street Journal* when he didn't have a clue. Mr. Burke was waiting for Zack to speak. He had to say something businesslike. Why couldn't he think? Where was his brain? If only there was some kind of distraction. . . .

Zack forced a grin, picked up his coffee, and "accidentally" spilled it all over his shirt.

"Oh, man!" he exclaimed. "Look what I . . ." Then he glanced at his watch. "Mr. Burke! I mean, Walter, look what time it is! I'm late for a physics lab." He jumped up from the table just as the waiter approached, carrying their plates of *buevos rancheros*.

"But what about breakfast?" Mr. Burke asked as Zack edged away from the table. "I owe you for golf."

"I'll have to take a brain check . . . I mean a *rain check*!" Zack said, waving and moving toward the door.

Finally, Zack made it outside and gulped in the fresh air. *What a predicament! How can I learn all about stocks and bonds on such short notice?* There was no way to fake it. He had to really know this

stuff—the stock listings, the Elliot wave theory, the whole megillah!

But if he could pull it off? Sheesh! It might mean *everything*. A cushy summer job, a fast track to big bucks, and an expressway to the heart of stunningly beautiful Leslie Burke!

Zack grinned. Already, his scheme was taking shape.

chapter

4

The gang was on a roll for free tickets that weekend. Mr. Burke invited everyone to sit in his box seats for the big homecoming game. When Alex and Slater begged off to sit with some wrestling buddies of Slater's, there were two extra tickets. So Leslie invited Mike Rogers, who brought along his date, English professor Judith Trudell.

Falcon Stadium was cold and windy. When Zack walked into the Burkes' box, he held his finger up to check the wind direction, then took a seat in the far corner—with the wind at his back.

I'm going to need all the help I can get, he reasoned, settling into the hard-backed chair. First of all, he had to keep Screech quiet. If his roommate started talking about economics and finance, Mr. Burke would see where Zack got all his info from. At the very least, he would take it as a cue and drag Zack into a business talk. And Zack definitely wasn't prepared for that—not yet. But that was only his first problem.

Zack also had to keep this whole summer intern

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thing hush-hush. He just knew Leslie would take it the wrong way. No matter what Zack said, she'd think he was just another Phil Skylark, trying to move in on her money. A little later in the semester, when he and Leslie were an established couple, he'd tell her all about it. He'd explain about affording a big, old, Victorian house, like the one in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and having the kind of life-style Leslie wanted. Then, she'd know his true intentions: true love.

Zack was so lost in thought, he didn't notice Leslie slide into the seat next to him.

"Hello," she said, pretending to knock on his head. "Anyone home?"

"Oh, Zack's just a little preoccupied. Probably thinking about the stock market," Mr. Burke said, sitting down next to Leslie. "I'm looking forward to continuing our conversation, son."

"Stock market? What is he talking about?" Leslie whispered to Zack.

"I worked as a stock boy at a supermarket once," Zack whispered back. "Maybe he's thinking of opening a chain of stores."

Zack turned his head and luckily spied Mrs. Burke leading Kelly and Screech to their seats. "Hello, everyone," he said, standing in a gentlemanly way to avoid Leslie's next question. "And look, here comes Mike Rogers, our resident assistant."

"Hi, gang," said Mike. "I think everyone knows

Judith Trudell. In fact, I think you guys have her for freshmen lit."

"Aren't you a bit old to be a resident assistant?" Mr. Burke said as Mike and Judith settled into their seats.

"Walter, this is Mike Rogers," Marge Burke told her husband. "You know—of the 49ers?"

Mr. Burke frowned. "You play professional football and you're living in a college dorm?"

"I'm retired," Mike said, laughing. "Guess you're too busy with business to follow football much, huh, Mr. Burke?"

The millionaire nodded. "Call me Walter. Golf's my game, Mike." He smiled at Zack. "Right, Zack?"

Zack smiled back. "Right, Walter."

"So what are you majoring in, Mike?" Mr. Burke asked, quickly changing the subject.

"It's starting to look like business," Mike clapped Screech on the back affectionately. "With a little help from my friends."

"I really like your parents," Zack said in a low voice to Leslie. He glanced over at Screech, who was busy with his notebook computer. So far, Screech had been quiet, and Zack hoped it would stay that way. But what if the Elliot wave file appeared on his computer screen? Mr. Burke would definitely ask about it! Zack had bought some economics books the other day, but hadn't so much as cracked their spines yet. He just wasn't ready to be grilled by Mr. Burke!

"Thanks, Zack," Leslie said. "What a nice thing to say."

"Huh?" said Zack. He forgot he'd said anything at all. He turned to face Leslie, and suddenly their faces were barely an inch apart. Was this their big moment? With Mr. Burke sitting one seat away?

Leslie flushed, then turned away, glancing quickly at her parents to see if they were watching. They weren't. She sighed in relief and kept her eyes on the football field.

"There's the kickoff!" Mrs. Burke shouted.

Leslie jumped to her feet alongside her mother, arms in the air, cheering as the Falcons' kicker shot the ball deep into the other team's end zone. Zack stood up and cheered, too, but he was oblivious to the action on the field. His eyes were on Leslie.

"Wasn't that great?" Leslie shouted as they sat back down.

"Yeah, a terrific throw. What an arm on that guy."

"What do you mean? He *kicked* it into the end zone."

"Right!" Zack said absentmindedly, moving closer to Leslie and gently touching her cheek. "Of course he did. Are you into football as much as your mom?"

"Well, I wasn't a cheerleader in high school," Leslie said quietly, "but at least I know what a kick-off is." She paused. "And a pass."

Suddenly, out of the corner of one eye, Zack saw that they were being watched by Mr. Burke. "Thanks for sharing that," Zack said loudly, moving away from Leslie and offering her his popcorn. "Want some?"

Leslie looked dumbfounded. She held up her own bag. "Zack, I've got my own, remember?"

At that moment, a Falcons' linebacker collided with the other team's quarterback and forced a fumble. The Falcons' fans, including everyone in the Burke box, jumped to their feet screaming and cheering. Zack snuck a peek at Mr. Burke and saw that—golf nut or not—the man was distracted by the game. Zack breathed a sigh of relief and resolved to stifle his romantic ideas for the time being, no matter how attractive Leslie looked—the wind gently blowing her blond hair, her cheeks rosy in the autumn chill, her white teeth sparkling in the afternoon sun. . . .

"Trade places with me, Les," Zack heard her father say. "I want to sit next to Mr. Morris here and talk business during the time-outs."

"Okay, Dad," Leslie agreed, looking over at Zack and shaking her head. "I never would have believed it. Zack Morris talking business instead of watching football," she whispered.

"Les, listen . . ." Zack began. What if Mr. Burke said something about the summer internship? Maybe he should tell Leslie first. . . .

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"Gee, why pursue an acting career?" Alex mused, crunching on her popcorn. *Batbing at the Blood Motel* was drawing to a gruesome conclusion on the VCR, and she and Slater were cuddled in the common room. "I could make a nice living selling fake blood to horror directors."

Alex and Slater had left the game early. Alex hadn't wanted to go at all, in fact; she'd wanted to work on her acting. And after she'd squirmed her way through the entire first half, Slater had said, "Okay, okay, already. Let's go back to the suite and watch those horror tapes of yours."

Slater still couldn't believe he left a football game for a woman. But he did. He just hoped she appreciated it.

"You're having second thoughts about auditioning?" Slater asked as he ejected the tape. "Maybe you should give up on the idea." He glanced at his watch. They could still make it back in time for the fourth quarter.

"Are you kidding?" Alex said, standing up to brush popcorn bits off her jeans. "I can outscreech any of these losers. Want me to show you?" She opened her mouth for a bloodcurdling yell.

"No, no, please!" Slater waved his hands in the air. "I promise I won't say one more discouraging word."

"It's a deal." Alex started toward the kitchen.

Then, affecting a Transylvanian accent, she added, "Would you like a nice red soda, young man? The color of blood? Bleh!"

Slater grimaced. "Just a glass of water, please." He put the video away, then picked up the other tapes. "What do you want to see next?"

Alex stopped and leered over at him like a poster girl for a horror movie. "Why, *Fangs for Your Memories*, of course!"

■ ■ ■

To Zack's relief, the homecoming game was so exciting that everyone was drawn into the action—even Screech. No one seemed to be thinking about business. But for added insurance, Zack had hustled Screech off at halftime and had gotten him to promise to keep quiet about economic theories. Screech was totally confused, but promised, anyway. After all, Zack was his best friend.

For the rest of the game, Zack watched the time clock more than the action on the field. The sooner it was over, the happier he'd be. At last, it was the fourth quarter.

"Hey, Walter," Mike said, turning in his seat to face Mr. Burke. "Screech here has been helping me with my stock portfolio, but I'll bet you've got a few tips. How about it?"

Mr. Burke looked surprised. "Screech? Maybe he's not the right person to ask. Zack here—"

Screech frowned. "What do you mean—"

"Wow!" Zack blurted out, pointing toward the door of the stadium. "Look what's going on!"

All heads swiveled in the direction Zack was pointing. A maintenance man was picking up some litter.

"Well, it looked interesting to me," Zack mumbled. "In fact, it reminded me of another maintenance man at another game. Hey, Mike, remember that time the 49ers went all the way?"

A broad smile swept over Mike's face. "Which time?"

"Uh . . ." Zack tried to think. 49ers. Joe Montana, quarterback. "You know, when they won the Super Bowl!"

Mike broke into a huge grin. "Yeah, I guess we did have a pretty good time that year. We pounded everybody! 'Course, I had to have two of my five major operations after that season, so I got pounded, too. But it's not so bad going into the operating room when you're wearing a Super Bowl championship ring." He held up a scarred, beefy hand to display the ring for Judith.

"Great story," Mr. Burke said. "So what were you saying about your investments, Mike?"

Oh, no! Zack thought. *Back on business!*

"Well, I started off in a mutual fund," Mike began.

"Then he came to see me," Screech piped up. Zack shot him a look and mimed zipping up his lip.

"And that's all I have to say," Screech added, going back to his computer doodling.

Zack needed somebody else to take center stage . . . not Mike . . . or Screech . . .

"Kelly!" Zack exclaimed, loudly breaking up her conversation with Mrs. Burke. "Show us one of those cheers you used to do at Bayside High! Do it for the Fighting Falcons!"

"Oh, come on, Zack, we were talking."

"Aw, Kel . . .," he moaned, all puppy-dog eyes. "For me?"

"Kelly was just telling me how the girls keep you guys in line," Mrs. Burke said playfully. She turned to her husband. "Leslie and the girls are all in the same karate class, dear."

"Good idea," Mr. Burke replied, nodding. "So, Mike, what about those investments?"

"Bayside, Bayside, knock 'em on their backsides!" Zack boomed, standing on his seat and acting out the old cheer.

"It's 'knock 'em on their bad side'!" Kelly cried, pulling Zack down. "Let me, so you don't ruin it." She stood up and caught her breath. "Okay, it went like this." Kelly jumped into the cheer, complete with all the moves. "Bayside, Bayside, knock 'em on their bad side! Bang 'em and whang 'em and stop 'em cold! Bayside, Bayside, make 'em fold!"

"Whang 'em?" Judith Trudell chuckled. "Whoever wrote that wasn't in my English class."

"There's the culprit," Screech announced, pointing to Zack with a mischievous grin. "Sign him up!"

"Literary license," Zack mumbled.

"Silly, huh?" Kelly asked as she took her seat again.

"Oh, heavens no, Kelly!" Mrs. Burke exclaimed. "That was wonderfully performed."

Just then the Falcons' quarterback threw a twenty-yard pass, and everyone focused on the field, jubilant over the Falcons' chances of winning the homecoming game. Sure enough, in the next play the Falcons scored the winning field goal with only seconds left on the clock.

Zack cheered louder than everyone else. He was finally off the business hook.

chapter 5

After leaving Falcon Stadium, the Burkes went off to an alumni get-together with Dean Eisenberg and some other faculty members. Later, they were attending a party at Coach Saroyan's house. They had invited Leslie and all her friends to come along, but only Leslie and Zack accepted. Everybody else had other plans.

The gang headed to the Falcon's Nest for a celebratory snack, then went separate ways.

Alone at last, Zack thought as he and Leslie walked back to the dorm by themselves. The noise at the Falcon's Nest had made private conversation almost impossible, and a rowdy victory celebration was going on in the middle of campus as well. But once they got away from the quad, it was quiet and subdued.

Zack was busy wondering how he would get through the party that night. He'd have to talk business with Leslie's father sooner or later. And chances were it was going to be sooner. One thing was certain, Zack decided: He'd have to hit those business books he'd bought. He had to be able to

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walk man-to-man with the millionaire. He had to sound as if he stepped right out of the boardroom of a major corporation.

He had to have that summer job!

Leslie didn't say anything about Zack being so quiet. She was pretty quiet herself, wrapped up in the beautiful fall evening—the red and gold leaves carpeting the ground and the brilliant sun setting over Falcon Stadium.

Finally, as they reached the dorm, Leslie broke the silence. "My dad seems to think pretty highly of you, Zack."

Zack shifted uncomfortably.

"But I think my parents must be getting to you," Leslie said, walking into the common room.

"Your folks getting to me? No way," Zack replied. He slumped onto the couch and picked up one of the books he'd bought earlier: *Winning the Business Game*. "Why?"

"I just thought you seemed a little nervous at the game." Leslie took one look at the book, then sat quietly on an arm of the couch. "Thinking of majoring in business?"

Zack gazed over the book at Leslie. Then, he turned it around as if noting the title for the first time. "Oh, you mean this? Just some light reading, that's all." He paused. "Don't you have to get ready for the party or something?"

Leslie folded her arms across her chest. "Looks

to me like you're boning up for an evening with my father."

"Okay, so maybe I'm a little intimidated. I mean, your father is quite a package. Business, business, business! It's hard to keep up!" He took a deep breath and resumed his reading.

Leslie uncrossed her arms. Slowly, she shook her head. "I haven't known you that long, Zack Morris, but I find it hard to believe you're intimidated. You weren't so intimidated when you played golf with Dad. You won!"

Zack lowered his book. The golf game seemed like it happened a lifetime ago . . . before he bought this business book . . . before he heard about the summer internship . . . before that endless football game. "Yeah, but things were different then."

Now Leslie was suspicious. Her voice hardened. "Are you saying you have something *else* going on with Daddy?"

Zack gulped. Talk about intimidation! It must run in the Burke family. He put down the book and forced a laugh. "Now that's funny."

"I don't want another Phil Skylark scene, Zack. If you're being weird because my dad's so rich, I don't see how it could work out between us." As Zack stumbled to come up with a reply, Leslie headed for her room. "Maybe I should go to that party by myself."

Zack leaped over the back of the couch and

caught her arm. "Wait!" he cried. "You don't understand." He gently steered her back to the couch, then sat down next to her. "I . . . okay, here's the truth." *No way! He couldn't tell her the truth! He really would look like another Phil Skylark!* "Uh, I'm really . . . impressed by your dad, Les, and . . . well, hanging out with him has gotten me thinking pretty seriously about . . . things. For once." *There. That sounded believable.*

Leslie's frown began to fade, and Zack zeroed in.

"Remember what you said after the movie the other night? Well, it got me thinking about how different things could be in our lives. And I realized I have to apply myself to get what I want." Zack looked away and gathered his thoughts. What did he want? How about that cushy summer internship? How about one Leslie Burke for a girlfriend?

"It hit me all at once," Zack continued. "I have to get serious. I have to spend time working to achieve things. I realized life is a . . ." He glanced at his book, *Winning the Business Game*. ". . . a game to be won!"

Leslie's frown evaporated. Then it bloomed into a grin. "Why, Zack, that's *incredible!*" she exclaimed, throwing her arms around him. "You're really growing, not looking for the easy schemes anymore. . . . You're ready to work for results. With big changes like that going on, I can see why you might be a little distracted!"

Zack thought the moment might be right for another change—a change in their relationship. But just when he was ready to plant a big kiss right on Leslie's lips, she pushed him away and said, "I'm going to get ready right now! This is so great, Zack!" She paused a moment outside her bedroom door. "And I'll tell you what—if it makes you more comfortable, I'll ask Daddy to lay off the business talk tonight."

"That would be terrific."

"You got it, Zack Morris!" Leslie said, going into her room.

Zack sank onto the couch with a relieved sigh, and picked up his book. Business talk or no business talk, he might as well start cramming now. "You got it, Zack Morris," he repeated quietly. He shook his head, thinking about everything he was trying for. "I hope I get it, Leslie Burke."

■ ■ ■

Right off the bat, Slater knew he was in trouble at the theater party. He'd agreed to come for Alex, but it looked like he'd made a big mistake. As he walked into the room, Conrad Lerner—the balding director with a vandyked beard and mustache—came over, eyeing him suspiciously.

"This is your friend, Alex?" he asked, taking in the bright-red football jersey, beat-up jeans, and

muscles. "I thought you'd come with someone from the theater department."

Slater looked around the room. It was true: He stuck out like a sore thumb from the rest of the crowd. Almost everyone was wearing black and moving languidly around the room, like they were underwater. Still, Slater was determined to give it his best shot. He didn't give up going to Coach Saroyan's party for nothing.

"Glad to meet you, Conrad," he said, putting out his hand.

Reluctantly, Lerner shook it. Then he clapped his hands excitedly and faced the room. "Attention, everyone!" he announced. "We're ready to start the exercises."

"Exercises!" Slater said to Alex. "Guess I'm the only one dressed for the party after all."

"Not those kind of exercises," Alex hissed.

People were pushing furniture against the walls, clearing an empty space to form a circle.

Uh-oh, thought Slater as everyone sat down and somebody switched off the lights. Somehow, he knew this wasn't a make-out party, either.

Lerner moved to the center of the circle. He was holding a lighted candle and looking—as far as Slater was concerned—pretty creepy.

"Okay," Lerner told the group. "The purpose of this exercise is to purge our gathering of all negative

energy. If you feel like groaning, groan. If you feel like moaning, moan. If you feel like screaming, be my guest. Just let it go, and then we can turn on the lights and have a good time!"

"Why can't we just forget the negative stuff and have a good time, anyway?" Slater asked innocently.

"That doesn't work for me," the director said a little rudely. "Would you like to go first, Mr. Slater?"

Slater hesitated. Which was more embarrassing: refusing to moan, groan, and scream, or just going ahead and doing it? He shrugged. "Might as well go for it," he told the director.

Slater glanced around the room, then closed his eyes and let out an intense cry of anguish. "Aaaaaooooooooowww!" Two girls and one guy jumped in the air. "That was from the time I broke my ankle playing football," Slater explained. "How was it?"

"If I ever make a Tarzan movie, you've got the part," Lerner said dryly. "Now how about you, Alex?"

Alex nodded, then let out a shriek that rattled the rafters. Slater could swear he heard a glass break somewhere. For a long moment there was silence, then the director began clapping loudly. Soon the air was filled with applause.

"Make a note!" Lerner shouted to his chubby assistant sitting next to him. "That's *exactly* the

scream I want for *I Walked with Zombies*. Don't you think, Greenfield?"

"What was that you said, Mr. Lerner?" Greenfield asked, tugging on his ear to get his hearing back.

"Forget it," said the director. Then, placing the candle in the middle of the circle, he took a seat between Slater and Alex. "That was magnificent!" he told Alex, massaging her shoulders supportively.

Alex blushed with pride.

Lerner slapped Slater on the back with a grin. "And you, Tarzan! Not bad for a jock!"

"Go, team," Slater mumbled, shaking his head.

"All right, you actors!" exclaimed Lerner, clapping his hands together rapidly. "Somebody else let it all go!"

■ ■ ■

On the way back from Coach Saroyan's party, Leslie insisted on stopping at Moon Toons to buy the sound track to *Meet Me in St. Louis*. When she and Zack got back to the suite, they had the place to themselves. So she put the CD in the player and a video of a roaring fire in the VCR. When Judy Garland started singing "The Boy Next Door," Zack realized it was the greatest romantic opportunity he'd had yet.

There was one big problem, though. He was

stuffed to the gills with food. A great deal of planning had gone into Coach Saroyan's bash. The theme was *Casablanca*, and the party had an atmosphere straight out of a Casbah—the native section of a North African city. The cuisine was North African and Middle Eastern. A trio provided the music: a bongo player, a violinist, and someone playing an oud—an instrument that looked like a small guitar with a round back. Zack was so fascinated by it all, he didn't notice how much he was eating . . . until he was walking back to the dorm feeling like an overstuffed grape leaf.

"Comfy?" Leslie asked quietly, settling in beside him on the couch.

"I think I ate a little too much," Zack replied, shifting his weight in a fruitless attempt to get comfortable.

Leslie looked toward the television "fire" and sidled up to Zack. "What's on your mind right now?" she asked in a low voice.

Zack watched the flames leap and dance. "Overstuffed grape leaves," he said, breaking the mood.

Leslie scooted back. "What?"

Before Zack could explain—*bam!*—Alex shot through the front door and stormed angrily toward her room, an annoyed Slater fast on her heels.

"Alex, come on!" Slater was pleading. "Stop being so dramatic, and let me explain."

"Haven't you said enough? I don't think you understand drama, or actors, or directors! Good-night!" Alex turned and tried to get in her room, but she was too upset to get the doorknob to turn.

Slater reached over, flicked open the door, and gave a sweeping bow. "There you go, Queen of Scream."

Alex narrowed her eyes. "Did I mention that you're *insensitive*, too?" That said, she stepped in and slammed the door behind her.

"Brother," Slater muttered, turning around. Then he noticed that Zack and Leslie were sitting on the couch—and that Kelly and Screech were just coming in. "Sorry about that, guys."

"I take it the bloom is off the rose—and the romance," Leslie said sympathetically.

"I take it the rosebush died," Slater sighed. "Hey, preppie," he said, looking over at Zack. "Wanna go out and get something to eat?"

Zack's face paled. More food? He moaned in pain.

Her face stricken with concern, Leslie looked toward her room, then to Zack. Alex or Zack? Who needed her more?

"I'd better go talk to Alex," Leslie said, hurrying off.

"So what was *that* all about?" Kelly asked, coming in and closing the front door.

Slater threw up his hands in frustration. "Oh, we did this dumb exercise at that weird theater

party, and Conrad Lerner went on and on about how much he liked Alex's scream. So just before we got back to the dorm, I told her it's too bad he's not remaking *The Bride of Frankenstein* because she'd be perfect for the part."

Kelly nodded her head. "Oh, I get it. That's the movie where the actress who plays Frankenstein's bride does all that screaming."

Slater nodded. "Right. For some reason that really ticked her off. She wouldn't let me explain."

"Let me talk to her, Slater," Kelly suggested. "I think this needs a woman's touch." She turned and headed into her room to join Alex and Leslie.

"Thanks, Kelly," Slater called after her. He strolled over to Zack. "I just don't understand women," he said. "Instead of acting all huffy and puffy, you'd think Alex would be happy I even went to that party with her. You know they didn't serve a thing to eat? So how about grabbing a burger, guys? Maybe some chili cheese fries and a Dr. Pepper? Or there's this new restaurant I heard about called Tandoor. It's Middle Eastern fast food."

"Please, please, no more!" Zack exclaimed, grabbing a business book from the counter as he ran for his room.

Slater looked at Screech, puzzled. "Is my mouth saying something my ears aren't hearing?"

Screech assumed a thoughtful pose, chin in

hand. "Someone at the quorum today mentioned a book that might explain this," he mused. "It's called *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*."

"There's a bookstore on the way to the Falcon's Nest," Slater said. "Wanna go?"

chapter

6

It was Tuesday night, just a few days after the football game. Screech was working on his computer, looking at some stock tables and trying to come up with new investments for Mike. But instead of stock figures, he kept envisioning Zack's face on-screen.

Screech realized he often missed a lot of what was going on. He misunderstood people, or thought a word or phrase meant one thing when it really meant another. But he knew something was definitely up with Zack. The guy always had a book in his hand. All day Sunday—morning, noon, and night—he was reading. True, Leslie had told everyone that Zack had made a decision to buckle down and get serious for the first time in his life. But Zack wasn't studying class-assigned textbooks. They were all business books, and Zack wasn't taking a single business course!

On Monday though, Screech really began to wonder. Zack didn't show up for their English class or the sociology class they shared. Plus, there was

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no sign of Zack in the Falcon's Nest at lunch. Very odd.

Then, to make matters worse, Zack stayed in on Monday night instead of going to the Falcon's Nest to eat supper and watch Monday Night Football—and Mike Rogers was even paying!

"Now, what happened today?" Screech asked himself aloud. "Oh yeah, Zack blew off a couple of classes he had with Slater and barely said two words to anyone. Even Leslie." Screech switched off the computer. Tomorrow, he decided, he'd talk things over with Slater. Maybe *he* had a clue what was going on.

So, early Wednesday morning, while Slater was watching "The Flintstones" and eating cereal in the common room, Screech spoke up.

"The way I figure it, Zack has missed eight classes this week. Whatever's going on, I think we should take some action. Zack is our best friend, Slater."

"I agree," Slater said, getting up from the coffee table with his empty bowl. "Something's definitely wrong with the guy. He never goes to class, but he's constantly studying."

Slater put his bowl on the counter and picked up a stack of books on his way back to the couch. "Just look at these!" Slater declared, tossing the books toward Screech as he read off the titles. "*Ten Dirty Little Secrets of Harvard MBAs*." Toss. "*How to Renegotiate Anything*." Clunk. *Crash!*

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"Oops, sorry, Screech. Guess you should have ducked. And this last one, *Trumping Trump*." Slater shook his head, puzzled. "I've never seen him this studious about anything."

"I've never seen him *studious*!" Screech exclaimed. "Got a game plan?"

Slater started to answer, but stopped when the door to their room opened. Zack, still wearing his bathrobe, stumbled into the common room, looking bleary-eyed from lack of sleep. He was clutching a cordless phone.

"That's fine, Mr. Burke," Zack said, yawning. Then he turned the phone so it was right side up. "That's fine, Mr. Burke," he said again. "I'm free for golf tomorrow afternoon. Sure. . . . Classes? Oh, classes are no problem. Three o'clock? See you there."

Still holding the phone, Zack poured some cornflakes into a bowl. Then he opened the fridge, grabbed a carton, and poured orange juice on top. Orange juice? Slater waved a hand to get his attention. Eyes barely open, Zack hung up the phone in Slater's outstretched hand, then headed back into the bedroom, eating his cornflakes with a fork.

"*That* is distressing," Slater declared.

"Yeah," Screech agreed. "How is Zack going to scoop up the juice with a fork?"

"We better get to the bottom of this fast," Slater said.

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Just then Alex stepped into the common room, followed by Leslie and Kelly, all ready for class. "Good-morning, Screech," Alex said pointedly. Leslie and Kelly looked at Slater and shrugged. They'd been trying for days to convince Alex to take it easy on Slater, but they hadn't made much progress. Alex was still upset about *The Bride of Frankenstein* fight.

Maintaining an angry silence, Alex stepped into the kitchen, fixed herself some coffee in a paper cup, then started for the door. She paused a moment, and Slater jumped up, thinking she'd talk to him at last. But Alex only gave him a haughty look.

Stone-faced, Slater turned away, his back tense.

"Bye, Leslie, Kelly, and Screech," Alex said. "You three have a nice day." She went out the doorway.

All eyes turned toward Slater. Trying to ignore his suitemates' looks, he gathered together his books. "Got to run," he said, standing by the door and waiting for Alex to be gone from view.

"Slater," Kelly said in exasperation. "You two should really sit down and—"

"Sorry. Late for class! *You three have a nice day*," he said in disgust, then stepped out and pulled the door shut behind him.

"Boy," Screech remarked. "That scene looked like it was from *The Bride of Frankenstein*, the first time the bride met the monster."

"Don't say that to Alex," Kelly said with a laugh. "She'll be mad at you, too."

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"This whole thing has gotten out of hand," Leslie said, opening a package of Pop-Tarts. She took one for herself and handed the other to Kelly. "And it's all because Alex thinks Slater doesn't care about her acting . . . that he's always making fun of her."

"We tried talking to her," Leslie told Screech. "But all she does is listen and then go, 'Yeah, but he can be such a *jerk*!' It's getting so bad, we practically have to de-ice our room every time we mention Slater's name."

"Got any ideas, Screech?" Kelly asked.

"You're asking *me* about personal relationships? Let me think about this." Screech gazed off into space.

"You know," Kelly told Leslie, "I vote we corner her and make her sit down with Slater and talk things over."

"I agree," Leslie said. "Ready for class?"

Kelly nodded. "Bye, Screech."

"See you later," Leslie added.

A moment after the girls left, Screech suddenly snapped his fingers. "I know! There was this psychological study about relationships between athletes and actors. . . ." He looked up and saw that everyone was gone. "Wow," he said to the empty room. "I wonder if they've done any psychological studies about people who talk to themselves?"

□ □ □

Zack Zeroes In

Pinning Alex down for a discussion was going to be tricky, since she knew exactly what Kelly and Leslie wanted to talk about: Slater. But Alex and Kelly had an ace up their sleeves. They could always use karate. So that afternoon, when Alex was studying in their room, they went into action. Quietly, they slipped inside and locked the door. Then they demanded that Alex come around. To their amazement, Alex opened right up, without them saying another word.

"I've been thinking about what went wrong with Slater," she announced, sitting cross-legged on the bed. "It's his insecurities."

"What?" asked Kelly.

"Now hear me out," she said, holding up a hand. "I was mad at Slater for making fun of my acting. But he's not really making fun—he's covering up his true feelings. He's really insecure. What if I get this part in Conrad Lerner's film, become a big movie star, and leave him in the dust? It *is* a possibility. But Slater is afraid to give me credit. He's holding me back."

"*And no one*," she added dramatically, "comes between Alex Tabor and her film career. Nobody, no how, no way, José."

"But how do you know you'll really get the part?" Leslie asked. "Wait!" she said, before Alex could get angry at her. "What I mean is, how do you know this director is on the level?"

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Alex jumped up off her bed and grabbed a hairbrush from the dresser. "I appreciate your concern," she said, "but famous directors discover promising young actors all the time. It's a Hollywood tradition." She brushed out her curls as if she hadn't a care in the world. "Besides . . ."—she flipped her hair back for emphasis—"it was only a matter of time before Hollywood found me."

Kelly picked up a stuffed bear from her bed and hugged it absentmindedly. "I wouldn't advise jumping to any conclusions about Hollywood, Alex. I'm from southern California, remember? I've heard stories. You've got to be careful."

Alex frowned. "Careful?"

"Sure," Kelly replied as she stood up and went to her dresser. "I mean, how do you know this director's intentions? Maybe Slater isn't jealous but is just trying to keep your feet on the ground. Maybe he doesn't want you to lose your head over this and get hurt."

"Are you suggesting that I don't have talent?" Alex challenged. "That Conrad Lerner is just leading me on with no plans for my career?"

Kelly looked helplessly at Leslie. This wasn't going well at all. "No, no—" said Leslie, but she was interrupted by a knock.

"Who comes to our suite and bothers to knock?" Leslie asked, opening their bedroom door. "Anybody expecting anything?"

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Kelly and Alex shook their heads and went with Leslie to check. A second later, a smiling Conrad Lerner, hands clasped behind his back, dressed from head to toe in basic, creepy black, was standing in the room.

"Hello, Alex, . . . girls. Alex, I brought you something."

"Don't take it!" Kelly said, alarmed. This guy looked like Dracula on a bad day. "It could be dangerous."

"Dangerous?" Conrad Lerner said. "It's just a video." With a dramatic flourish, he produced a cassette from behind his back and offered it to Alex. "Rather than do your audition from a short story, I thought it might be better if you did a scene from a film. Besides, they've been teaching 'Eve's Diary' in English lit classes at Cal U since the Dark Ages. It was my mother's favorite." He nodded at the video. "I brought you *The Bride of Frankenstein*." A spooky grin spread over his face. "The way the actress screams in this picture absolutely thrills me to my bone marrow!"

"I can tell," Leslie remarked, trying not to shiver.

"Why don't you come in, Conrad?" Alex offered, taking the director's arm and leading him past her suitemates. "Can I get you anything? Coffee, tea, . . ."

"Garlic?" Kelly groused, shutting the door.

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"What was that?" the director asked, a puzzled look on his face.

"Oh, Kelly's just being funny!" Alex laughed, waving a dismissive hand at her friend. "How odd, Conrad. We were just talking about you." She ushered the director toward the couch. "Maybe there's some kind of psychic link between us or something?"

"Oh, I can feel the vibrations," Leslie put in sarcastically, not quite trusting the strange-looking director.

A frown brushed across the director's brow. But, ignoring Kelly and Leslie, he turned to Alex. "I'd love a cup of Earl Grey, if you have it," he told her.

"It's my favorite!" Alex said, opening a cabinet.

"And is there any way," the director continued, looking around the room, "I could get you to lower the lights?"

Leslie and Kelly giggled nervously as Alex put a teakettle on the stove, then turned a switch, dimming the lights.

"Ah, that's much better!" Conrad declared. "I have this condition with my eyes. Bright lights get to me."

Afraid her friends were going to make some kind of comment, Alex quickly said, "Conrad, let me introduce you to my *terrific* roommates, Kelly Kapowski and Leslie Burke. Girls, this is Conrad Lerner, the movie director."

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"Pleased to meet you, dear ladies," Conrad intoned, sounding just like Vincent Price. He frowned as he gazed back and forth between Kelly and Leslie. "I haven't seen you two around the drama department, have I?"

"Now there's an original line," Kelly said, turning away.

"No, I couldn't be that lucky," the director said.

Alex hurried over to hand Conrad his tea. "What did you mean, you couldn't be that lucky?"

"Well," Conrad began, taking a seat on the couch. "You see, there are several parts for screaming young women in my film, and I just happened to think . . ." He set down his cup and saucer and stroked his beard thoughtfully. "No, that would be too easy, wouldn't it?" He picked up his tea and took another sip. "No, no, much too easy."

Sensing the director's meaning, Kelly began to change her tune. "*What* would be much too easy?" she asked, stepping toward the couch somewhat cautiously.

"I was about to ask the same thing," Leslie said, moving closer as well.

Conrad looked at Kelly, then Leslie. Then back to Kelly again. "Well," he said finally, "I suppose it *could* happen. Have either of you girls considered a career in acting?"

"Just what did you have in mind?" Kelly was

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still on the defensive, despite the fact that her interest was piqued.

"Well, I'd have to see how you look wearing blood," he answered quickly. "Fake blood, of course. I need a brunette and a blond to die for me. In my film, that is. I don't pay more than scale, but you'd get great close-ups. And I'd have to hear you scream. Does that sound interesting?"

Kelly and Leslie just stood there, speechless.

"I think you've gotten their attention," Alex said, smiling at the director. She'd had a moment of jealousy, but Conrad was obviously thinking of her for the starring role. She could handle giving bit parts to her inexperienced roommates. Besides, now they'd see what potential stardom felt like. Now they'd understand.

"Gosh," Kelly said, getting her voice back at last. "I've known guys who made me want to scream, but I never met one who would pay me for it."

"So when's our audition?" Leslie asked.

"Why not right now?" said the director. He stood up, grabbed the video he'd brought along, and popped it in the VCR. "I'll show you how the actress did it in the movie, then you show me your . . . interpretation." He chuckled. "It's always such a pleasure discovering new . . . victims."

chapter

7

When Screech came back to the suite after class that afternoon, he found Zack on the couch, channel surfing between a motivational seminar on the business channel and the "Wall Street report on CNN." On the coffee table, right in front of Zack, was a stack of business magazines. A copy of *Forbes*, listing the four hundred richest men in America, was spread open.

Screech checked the suite. No one was around, so it was the perfect time to find out what the new Zack was all about.

"So, Zack, checked the price of gold today?" he asked jokingly.

"Yeah, it's worth \$375 an ounce on the London market," Zack said without taking his eyes off the TV screen.

Screech listened, dumbfounded. He pinched himself, just to make sure he wasn't having a bad dream. "Ow!"

"What's the matter, Screech?" Zack asked, still staring at the screen.

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Screech decided to get right to the point. "Zack, can we talk?"

Zack switched the channel to a CNBC discussion about finances and farm products. "We can talk during the commercials," he said, putting down the remote control to take some notes.

Quickly, Screech grabbed the remote and zapped off the TV.

"Hey, give that back!" Zack cried as Screech jumped out of his reach. "How am I gonna know about wheat futures?"

"See if the price of Wheaties goes up, I don't know!" Screech yelped, hopping around to evade Zack's grabs at the remote. Finally, Screech climbed up on the kitchen counter and held it high above his head. "I'll give it back after we talk. Come on, Zack. You're driving me and Slater crazy with all this business stuff!"

Zack leaped on the counter, and Screech jumped off, making a beeline for the safety of the couch. Zack was one step behind him. Then, just as Screech made an Olympic-caliber dive into the cushions, Zack grabbed the remote.

"What's all the commotion?" Leslie asked. She had just come in, unnoticed by the guys.

Zack whipped around to face her as Screech popped up from the couch. "I was just . . . uh . . . waking Screech from his nap," Zack told Leslie. "You know, you'd be more comfortable if you

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napped in your room, Screech," Zack said helpfully, pulling his roomie off the couch and shoving him toward their room.

"But I'm not sleepy!" Screech protested.

"Oh, you're just saying that," Zack said. "You always get so cranky when you're tired." He nudged Screech the rest of the way into the room, then shut the door and stuck a chair under the knob so Screech couldn't open it. "Try to relax, okay, Screech?" Ignoring Screech's muffled shouts, Zack strolled over and casually sat back on the couch. "So, Les, how have you been, anyway?"

"Are you sure Screech wants to nap?" Leslie asked doubtfully. "He sounds wide awake to me."

"He'll settle down. And isn't this nice? You and me alone? I've been so busy lately, we haven't spent much time talking. I want to say I'm sorry."

A slow smile spread over Leslie's face. "You don't always have to say something when we're together, Zack," she said, sitting close to him on the couch. "There are other forms of communication, you know. Like the other night at my door, remember?"

"How could I forget?" Zack went to put his arm around her. But as he lifted his arm, he noticed his watch. "Uh-oh!" he exclaimed, scooting away. He aimed the remote. "There's a program I've got to watch for . . . for something I'm doing this summer."

"It's *September* and you're thinking about the summer?"

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Zack shrugged. "Never can do enough planning, I guess. That's the new me—always planning ahead."

Leslie rose from the couch with an exasperated sigh. "Well, if you can fit me into your schedule, you know where I live."

"Oh, believe me, I know," Zack replied, trying to sound reassuring. "It's just like in that movie. I'm the boy next door."

"I suppose," Leslie said, going into her room.

When Leslie's door clicked shut, Zack flicked on the TV. Maybe Leslie wasn't taking all this too well, but a man had to do what a man had to do. He turned up the volume and switched on CNN. Good. A panel discussion on the European common market.

Zack reached for his notepad. But just then a chair clattered to the floor—the chair he was using to keep Screech in the bedroom.

"Okay, Zack," Screech said, walking in and flexing his muscles. "You can't keep a guy like me locked up. Wanna spill the beans, now that we're alone?"

Zack sighed and switched off the TV. "Okay, I guess I owe you that. Let's go to our room and I'll explain."

"... so Leslie probably thinks I'm playing hard to get or something," Zack told Screech, finishing his explanation. "But the truth is, I just don't want

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to blow my chance at getting the best summer job I could possibly imagine. And if Walter Burke likes what I do, I'll probably have a job every summer until I'm a senior. And who knows what might happen after that, Screech? Plus, a high-paying job would only help my relationship with Leslie. I'd be able to afford the things she's used to having."

Screech nodded sympathetically, then frowned. "But don't you think you're being a little bit dishonest? If Leslie finds out what you're up to, she's going to be angry."

Zack shook his head. "Screech, you're the only one I've told about this. She won't know unless you tell her."

Screech considered the situation. "We've known each other since kindergarten, but why do you always put me in positions like this?"

"Because we've known each other since kindergarten," Zack replied. "Besides, I know I can trust you. Look at it this way, I'll just cram on business stuff long enough to be able to impress Mr. Burke—which means after I lose to him in golf tomorrow—then things will get back to normal. By the time summer rolls around, my relationship with Leslie will be in such good shape it'll just seem natural that I go to work for her father. It'll be a wonderful surprise for her."

"Sounds logical enough," Screech said. But he sounded doubtful.

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"I knew I could count on you!" Zack said, clapping Screech on the back. "And, hey, maybe I can get you a job with the company, too."

"Maybe, maybe not," Screech replied mysteriously.

"Huh? You'd turn down a cushy job?"

Screech picked up a tennis racket and an athletic bag full of tennis gear. "I gotta go play tennis with Mike Rogers and talk stocks. If he keeps doing well on his investments, who knows? I might be a full-time investment counselor by summer."

□ □ □

While Zack was reading through some business profiles in his room that evening, Screech, Slater, Leslie, and Kelly were watching TV in the common room. "Let's watch wrestling," Slater said. "This old movie is boring."

"What's on the sci-fi channel?" Screech asked. "Maybe they're rerunning something good."

"Come on," said Kelly. "Let's just watch MTV."

"No way," Leslie put in. "I like this old movie."

Everyone started talking at once, and no one noticed Alex walk in with a tall, dark, handsome young man until she turned off the set.

"There!" she said, stepping back from the TV. "You don't need TV when you have two live actors right in front of you."

"This is Bobby, everybody," she continued as

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one by one everybody headed to the kitchen with empty glasses, cans, and microwave popcorn bags. "Bobby Fratello, this is Leslie Burke, Kelly Kapowski, and Screech Powers. Bobby's in my drama class. He's also a really talented writer."

"Did you say *Screech*?" Bobby asked, grabbing Screech's hand in a death-grip handshake.

"Samuel, actually," Screech said in a screechy voice filled with pain. "They call me Screech because... well, it's a long story." He turned toward his room, rubbing his injured hand.

"A. C. Slater," Slater said, shooting Alex a dirty look as he offered Bobby a shake. "I guess Alex didn't see me." He gazed at Alex with disdain. "Had an eye exam lately, Alex?"

"Had a life lately?" Alex shot back.

"Here's your soda!" Leslie said, pushing a can into Slater's hands as she stepped between the two of them. She nudged Slater away, trying not to be too obvious. "So, uh, Bobby, you're a writer?"

"Yeah," he replied shyly. "And I think Mr. Lerner likes my stuff. He put me and Alex together to do a scene from a play I wrote for her movie audition."

"Oh? What's your play about?" Kelly asked, tossing some cans into the recycling bin. Even though her screaming audition for Conrad had been a complete flop, she was still curious.

"It's called *Eve and the Vampire*," Bobby said, grinning with pride. "It's a takeoff on the Garden of

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Eden story—and the Mark Twain one. You know, 'Eve's Diary'?" Everyone nodded. They'd only heard it about twenty times when Alex was thinking about using it for her tryout. "Anyway, instead of Eve and the regular snake, this snake is really a vampire. It's really a new angle."

"Hmm. *Eve and the Vampire*. Wonder which part Alex plays?" Slater said, as if he were talking to himself. Then, without waiting for a response he added, "I'm going to go play cards with some guys on the fourth floor. Maybe I'll even spend the night." *And the rest of the semester*, he added to himself.

■ ■ ■

Screech woke up at two o'clock in the morning, stiff and sore from his tennis match with Mike Rogers. Moaning, he got out of bed and headed into the common room.

"It's not that you're in bad shape, Screech m'boy," he told himself as he made his way to the refrigerator. "It's just those ninety-mile-an-hour serves that kept missing your racket and hitting parts of your body." He felt for broken bones. "I'm lucky my rib cage is still intact," he mumbled, pouring a glass of milk.

Screech put the milk in the microwave to warm it up. While it was heating, he noticed Zack, sitting in the easy chair, poring over a new book. "Don't you ever quit?" he asked.

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"What?" came a befuddled reply. "Hey, Screech," Zack said sleepily. "Was that you talking? I thought I was hearing my own thoughts, and I was wondering if I was losing my mind."

Screech shook his head. He wondered, too—wondered what was happening to Zack.

The microwave beeped, and Screech got his glass of milk. "You're driving yourself into the ground," he told Zack, handing him the drink. "Here, you need this more than I do. It will make you feel better."

Zack took a few sips, then, moving in slow motion, closed his book. "That's the last chapter for today, anyway." He got up and crept toward the kitchen, yawning like an overfed lion.

Zack put the half-full glass in the cabinet and turned to his friend.

"Before I forget, could you explain that Elliot wave stuff again? I'm seeing Mr. Burke tomorrow, and I don't want to bluff my way through it again."

"Aw, Zack. I gotta get some sleep!"

"Real quick, please? It's important." Yawww-nnnnnnn.

Screech was tired, achy, and grouchy. But, hey, anything for a friend. Especially a friend he'd known since kindergarten. "Okay. But why did Mr. Burke ask you about it in the first place?"

"I brought it up."

Screech nodded and started for the bedroom.

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"Hey, where are you going?" Zack mumbled, sitting back down in the easy chair.

"To get my notes," Screech said matter-of-factly. "Just sit there, and take it easy. The lecture begins shortly."

"Okay," Screech said a minute later, carrying his notes, some magazine articles, and a pie chart. "Ready when you are."

Zack didn't say anything.

"I said, I'm ready when you are, Zack."

Still no response. Screech took a closer look at Zack. His eyes were open, and he looked like he was listening. Screech snapped his fingers in front of his friend's face. No reaction. "Amazing," said Screech. "So *that's* how you sleep through lectures."

Screech gently pushed the easy chair back to a reclining position. Then he draped a blanket over Zack. "Sleep tight," he said quietly. "Don't let the chair bugs bite."

chapter 8

The next morning, Judith Trudell's English lit class was half empty. Kelly counted the seats. Exactly thirteen students were out, sick with the Asian flu. Luckily, no one in the suite had gotten it . . . yet . . . and all six friends were in class that day. Even Zack had made it, and that was something, although he did keep sneaking peeks at a business book in his lap.

Kelly couldn't help but notice that the three guys were sitting together in the back, and the girls were camped out in front, with Kelly sitting between Alex and Leslie. It seemed the fight between Alex and Slater was breaking up the suite.

Alex watched Slater whisper something to a girl across the aisle from him. The girl giggled, tossing her hair. *What an actor*, Alex thought. *I'm sure Slater will see right through her. At least I hope he will.* She couldn't seem to pull her gaze away from them.

Finally, Kelly said something to break the spell. "What's that, Kelly? I didn't hear you," Alex said,

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tearing her eyes away from Slater and looking at her friend.

"I said, I think you made Slater jealous by bringing Bobby to the suite last night."

Alex shot another look at Slater. "See? He is insecure."

"I wish you guys would sort it out," Leslie put in.

Alex twisted around. "You think I *don't*?" she hissed. "If only Slater would understand about drama." She took another look at him laughing and whispering with that other girl. *He certainly understands flirting*, she thought.

"Welcome, students," Judith Trudell said, coming into the room and putting an end to the conversation. "Today I'm going to talk about stories from the California gold rush period. I'd like to begin with a famous tale . . ." She paused to write the title on the blackboard behind her. ". . . by a fine writer named Bret Harte. It's called 'The Heathen Chineese.'"

As the class settled down to listen, Slater stole a glance at Alex. He missed her—even if she was having the time of her life with Bobby what's-his-name and that weird director—and wasn't giving him a second thought. But what could he say now? The situation had gotten out of hand, and he didn't know how to break the ice.

Zack was having just as much trouble concentrating on the lecture. Of course, he was trying to

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absorb two things at once: literature and business—and both on just a few hours of sleep. Zack yawned, then he took a long gulp of hot coffee he'd brought along in a thermos. Slumping in his seat, he propped his knees on the chair in front of him and tried to read his book.

Halfway through the period, Alex checked her makeup in a compact mirror. Actually, she was spying on Slater, who was looking decidedly unhappy. *Was he just bored with the class discussion?* Before Alex could make up her mind, Slater looked her way. Quickly, she snapped the compact shut and turned her attention back to Judith Trudell.

Five minutes before the bell rang, Professor Trudell scanned the room. She wanted to pick just the right student to answer a question. . . . There in the back! A thoughtful Zack Morris was looking down, contemplating very deeply, it seemed, the day's discussion. The perfect student to answer the last question of the period.

"Zack Morris," she called out. "In a few words, what was the impact of 'The Heathen Chineese' on our culture?"

"Owl!" Zack yelped as Slater jabbed him in the ribs. Then he looked up to see the professor staring his way, smiling expectantly. "Chinese? Culture?" He tried to recall the question, but couldn't get it. "Ah, well, . . . I love Chinese culture. I've been to Chinatown in San Francisco many times."

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Subdued chuckles broke out among the students, but a single look from Judith Trudell silenced them.

"That's fine," she said, more than a little puzzled. "But how did it affect you, personally?"

"Well, it personally has made me very happy. My favorite restaurant there, Chiu Chow, has absolutely the *best* moo shu duck I've ever had in my life!"

Now there was outright laughter. But before the professor could pursue the question further, the bell rang, opening a floodgate of activity.

Hurriedly, Zack gathered his books and his thermos. "Got to go," he told Screech and Slater. "Wall Street Week' is on the tube!"

Kelly brushed past him, rushing out of class, too. She wanted to get back to the suite before anyone else and leave notes for a "lunchtime suitemate meeting." She was sick of the situation between Alex and Slater. *Someone has to take action*, she thought. *And it might as well be me.*

■ ■ ■

It was lunchtime, and Kelly was the first one at the Falcon's Nest. "Hi, Kelly," said Slater, coming up behind her. He was wearing his apron and carrying a tray.

"Oh, Slater! I didn't realize you were working this shift. I'm sorry. I would have made this meeting another time."

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"That's okay, Kel," Slater said, not knowing what the meeting was about. "Why don't you grab that big table over there? That's my station, so I'll be over in a little while."

"Thanks, Slater," Kelly said gratefully. She slid into a seat and looked around just as Zack was coming in. Kelly waved, but Zack was in such a daze he didn't notice. He just kept roaming around the restaurant. Finally, Kelly got up and led him to the table.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

"Sure. I just need some coffee," he replied, trying to get a waiter's attention. He asked for a cup, and the waiter brought him one.

"What's with all this coffee?" Kelly asked. "It's all you ever drink these days."

"I've just acquired a taste for it since I've been in northern California, I guess," Zack said with a shrug. He picked up his business book and started to read.

"You keep it up with this 'taste' you've acquired and Juan Valdez is going to send you a personal thank-you card," Kelly replied. "Or should I just go over to the clinic and get some equipment to feed it to you intravenously?"

"Can you really do that?" Zack asked, looking up from his book.

Kelly sighed in exasperation. "I was kidding, Zack. Geez, what's with you? The way you answered that question in English lit was embarrassing. We're not in high school anymore. Judith Trudell dates

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Mike Rogers, for Pete's sake. What're you gonna tell her next time you see her?"

"About what?"

"About what!? Didn't you do your homework assignment?"

"Actually, Kelly, no. I've been busy with . . . other studies. It's too complicated to explain right now."

Kelly didn't get the chance to say anything else. Screech and Leslie were arriving at the table, one right after the other.

As he sat down, Screech rubbed his sore elbow. "Don't *ever* play tennis with Mike Rogers," he told his friends. "It's like playing Russian roulette with a cannon! So what's with the meeting, Kelly?"

"I'll explain in a minute," she said, still worried about Zack. It seemed like her suite was totally falling apart!

"Hi, guys." Leslie was settling into a chair next to Zack. "Look at this great book I just took out of the library." She held it up for everyone to see.

"What is it?" Kelly squinted across the table. "*Golden Olden California*," she read. "Boy, you must have really liked Professor Trudell's lecture this morning."

"I love things from the nineteenth century," Leslie explained. "The literature, the clothes, the manners. I guess I realized just how much I loved that stuff when we saw the movie the other night. Huh, Zack?"

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"Yeah. It had quite an impact," Zack said dryly.

Leslie shook her head. "It's amazing how a way of life can change so quickly."

"I'll say," Zack remarked.

"Hey, the whole gang—at least the part I like," Slater said, coming over to the table with his notepad and pencil. "Anybody want to order?"

Leslie grabbed a menu. "Can you give us a few more minutes, Slater? I'm not sure what I want, but I'm in the mood for something old-fashioned."

Slater didn't answer. Alex had just breezed into the restaurant, and he was noting her every move. When he looked back at the table, Kelly blushed and avoided his eyes. Suddenly, it clicked.

"Okay, I get it. This is some kind of powwow about me and Alex, isn't it? Great idea, Kelly!" He scowled.

"*Somebody* needed to call one," Kelly said, sounding determined.

"Thanks for the invite, but I think I'll pass on this little get-together." Slater backed away from the group. But before he could get much farther, Alex came over.

"Don't leave on my account," she said sweetly.

"I wasn't going anywhere," Slater said, standing in place like a statue.

"So what's with the big mystery meeting?" Alex asked, ignoring him as she slipped into a chair. She didn't wait for an answer. "You know," she contin-

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ued, picking up a menu, "if my movie audition comes off half as well as that love scene I did with Bobby Fratello in class today, I'm a shoo-in for the lead in Conrad's film."

"Who's ready to order?" Leslie said, trying to change the subject.

"Yes, a love scene. A very passionate one." Alex went on, pointedly keeping her back to Slater. "The idea of kissing a vampire is . . ." She shivered at the thought. "Well, it's *soooo* exciting!"

"That's it," said Slater. "I'm out of here." He seemed pretty angry, and Alex wondered if she'd gone too far.

"Oops," she said after he was gone. "I always get so carried away." Her voice cracked with emotion as she turned to Kelly. "Let's talk about something else. Why did you ask us here, anyway?"

"To tell you the truth, Alex, I wanted to talk about this thing between you and Slater. Speaking of vampires, it's sort of sucking the lifeblood out of the suite. Know what I'm saying?"

Alex blushed. She looked around the restaurant and saw Slater talking to another waiter. The waiter nodded, then started toward their table, ready to take their order. Alex turned back to Kelly, embarrassed that she'd chased Slater off like that.

"I see," she said quietly, getting up to leave. "Well, I guess I ruined that, too. I've got to get going, anyway. I'll see you guys later."

Zack Zeroes In

"Wait, aren't you going to eat something?" Screech called after her.

"I think she lost her appetite," Kelly said.

"Maybe she saw that tuna surprise," the waiter said, standing a few feet away. "Not our best dish."

"You don't understand," Kelly said, sighing.

"Well, is anyone here going to order?" The waiter scratched an ear and looked around impatiently.

"Tell you what," Zack said to him. "Why don't you bring me a pot of coffee."

"Excuse me. Did you say *pot*?"

"Yep. Pot. A full one."

"I'd better check the coffee supply, then. I'll be back for the rest of the order," said the waiter, hurrying off and shaking his head.

"A pot of coffee?" Leslie asked. "How long do you think you'll be here, Zack?"

"Five minutes, the way he's been drinking the stuff," Kelly said.

Ub-bub. What time is it, anyway? Zack thought, checking his watch. A quarter to three. Only fifteen minutes until his golf date with Mr. Burke. "Speaking of time," he said, "I think I'd better run along. I can pick up some coffee on the way." He stood up from the table.

"I'm sorry how this turned out," Kelly told the group. "But, Zack, why don't you stick around? We need your help with this situation. After all, Slater's your best friend."

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"That's why I try to stay out of his romantic affairs. People think about that kind of stuff too much, anyway, Kelly."

Kelly's eyes widened. This certainly wasn't the Zack Morris she'd dated in high school. What was going on?

"So what have *you* been thinking about the last couple of days?" Leslie asked. "I've noticed a distinct, how should I put it . . ."

"Cooling of the jets?" Screech offered.

"Something like that," Leslie admitted, a little embarrassed. "What's the story, Zack?"

Zack sat back down. "I thought we were here to talk about Slater and Alex."

"Well, we were," Kelly said. "But now that Leslie's asked, I'm curious, too. How about you, Screech?"

Screech gulped. "Not so much," he said. "I've known Zack since kindergarten."

"What does that mean, exactly?" Leslie asked.

"Maybe what Screech is saying," Zack put in, trying to shift attention away from his friend, "is that people in college ought to think more about what they're going to do with their lives *after* college. You know, the long term. It's time to get serious about things—which is exactly what I've been doing. Studying, reading, making the most of my time."

"Maybe you're right," Kelly said, her voice carrying echoes of contemplation. "In a few years, both

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Alex and Slater will probably think this whole thing was silly."

"Yeah," Screech put in, "maybe if we just give them some space it'll all blow up—I mean over—sooner than we think."

"I don't know if we have that much space in the suite," Leslie said with a laugh.

Zack laughed, too—anything to keep the conversation focused on someone else. Once again, he began to edge away from the table.

"So where are you running off to in such a hurry?" Leslie asked, glancing at her watch. "You don't have a class this time of day."

Zack wasn't about to say he was going to go butter up her father for a summer intern job. Instead, he kept backing away.

"Well, you know . . ." Slam! He collided with the waiter, who was bringing the coffee to the table. "Sorry," said Zack. "But I'm glad I bumped into you. Please cancel my order. I have to run!"

chapter 9

The Presidio was San Francisco's oldest and most prestigious country club, with eighteen holes of rolling, green golf links overlooking the San Francisco Bay. It was also the most expensive to join. The last time Zack had seen that many Mercedes-Benzes, Porsches, BMWs, and Cadillacs in one place, he'd been at the auto show.

As he walked along the path leading to the clubhouse, the spikes on his golf shoes clicking on the dark green concrete, he wondered if his bargain-basement clubs were up to snuff. He set his bag on a rack outside the entrance and looked over the other sets of clubs leaning there. They all looked brand new, and rather pricey. Making sure no one was watching, Zack took a towel from his golf bag and casually draped it over his clubs. *There!* he thought. *That should hold 'em until I dazzle everyone with my swing.* Zack stretched a moment and rubbed his back. If Screech thought he was sore from playing tennis with Mike, he should try sleeping on an easy chair for an entire night.

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Zack made his way to the club's coffee shop and spotted Mr. Burke sitting at the counter.

"Hi, Walter," he said. "I'm all set to play."

"Play?" The millionaire laughed. "Why, Zack old boy, don't you remember our phone call? I don't want you to play. I want you to *caddy*."

Zack was confused. "Caddy? As in carry your clubs around the course?"

"Well, I don't mean caddy as in Cadillac." Mr. Burke gave Zack a playful punch on the arm. "What's wrong? You're a strong young man—shouldn't have any trouble with my bag of sticks." He stepped back and pretended to examine Zack's physique. "Or do you have a bad back?"

Zack stood up straight. "No, sir. Not yet, anyway," he added under his breath.

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"There's no green like golf course green!" Mr. Burke crowed as he sized up his approach shot on the fourth hole. "Of course, there's the green that goes in your wallet. But my worthy opponents will be handing theirs over to me soon enough."

"Excuse me, Walter?" Zack questioned.

Mr. Burke shot him a stern glance and frowned.

"I mean, *Mr. Burke*," Zack said, correcting himself. Clearly, when the millionaire was at the Presidio he wanted to be called "Mr. Burke." "Are you sure that's the club you should be using? The way

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you've been hitting the ball today, I'd consider a wedge."

Mr. Burke considered Zack's advice, gauging the distance to the fourth hole's flag. Then he looked over at John Chapman, a chubby bank owner who always gave him a tough match. The other members of their foursome—a Japanese electronics manufacturer and the mayor of Sausalito—were a few feet away, scouting for their balls.

Chapman nodded his head. "Kid's right, Walter."

Silently, Mr. Burke exchanged clubs with Zack, then took a swing. The ball soared high and straight. Arcing gracefully, it dropped down, rolling to within a yard of the hole. Mr. Burke grinned, and handed Zack his club.

Zack smiled back as they headed toward the green. *The points are adding up*, he thought.

"Not only is Zack here a great caddy," Mr. Burke said as he tapped his putt into the hole. "He knows stock market theories, too. Tell John about that Elliot wave, Zack."

"Elliot wave?" The banker looked interested. "I get a newsletter about that. What did you figure out?"

Bingo! Zack smiled. *Finally, all the work was going to pay off, and pay off big.* He'd had a chance to go over Screech's info early that morning and was feeling pretty confident.

"Well, I have a book that charts American finan-

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cial history in detail," Zack said, leaning nonchalantly on Mr. Burke's bag of clubs. "When I studied it with the Elliot wave theory in mind, I drew some distinct parallels between the past and the present. America had economic downturns in 1819, 1837, 1857, 1873, 1893, and 1907 that were almost as bad as the one in 1929. They used to call them panics."

"Are you saying we're in for another depression?" John Chapman asked.

"No," said Zack. Imagine—he was reassuring a banker! "From everything I can tell, we should be heading into the biggest 'bull' market in history. *Everybody could get rich!*"

"If this is your caddy, Walter," said the banker, "I'd like to meet your investment counselors." Chapman sized up a putt that would put him even with Mr. Burke. He missed it by a foot.

Zack looked over at his future employer. Mr. Burke gave him a wink. *This summer job is in the hole*, Zack thought.

Two hours later, the game was over. Once again, Walter Burke had come out ahead of the others. "You know," the millionaire confided as Zack carried both their bags to the parking lot, "I'm beginning to think you're just the kind of young man my daughter should be dating, suitemates or not. How serious are you about a relationship with a Burke, Mr. Morris?"

They were at Mr. Burke's Mercedes limousine. Zack gulped as he handed over the clubs to the

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chauffeur. "Um, well, . . ." he stammered, "Leslie's bright and sweet and . . ."

"Don't you think she's pretty?"

"Yes, Mr. Burke, she's that, too, but—"

"Remember, call me Walter," said the millionaire, slipping a ten-dollar bill into Zack's palm. "We're not at the club now, so we can forget about formalities."

"Thanks, Walter!" Zack tried to act like he was impressed by the ten. Guess it was true what they said about rich people: They were terrible tipplers.

"You earned every cent. Listen, Zack. Let me talk plainly. I love my daughter and I don't want her marrying below her social station. She likes you quite a bit, and since you don't come from a rich family . . . Let's just say you're the number one contender for an internship at Burke Designs next summer."

Mr. Burke stepped into his limo and gave Zack another wink. "I wanted to see how you'd do under pressure—being forced to caddy and all—and you did well. Speak with you soon."

■ ■ ■

Screech and Mike Rogers were spending the afternoon in the common room, going over some new investments. "Look at that bar graph, and you'll see what I mean," Screech was saying as he pointed to a display on the computer screen.

Mike leaned closer and studied the chart. He cracked his knuckles. "Gotcha. When you put my

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investment patterns on to a bar graph like that, it's easier to follow."

"Right. Want to see your profits on a pie chart?"

Mike patted his stomach fondly. "Nah, I had enough pie at lunch. But I want to talk to you about something else. That pie today? I shared it with Judith Trudell."

"So this relationship is coming along pretty well, huh?"

Mike nodded. "Yeah, but she mostly talked about Zack."

Screech gasped. "You mean she has a thing for Zack?"

"No, don't be ridiculous. She's just worried about him. She thinks he's been acting strange in class."

"Strange?" Screech said uneasily. "What is strange, anyway? You know, some people might consider me strange."

Mike laughed. "Good point. But Judith thought Zack was acting more weird than usual. She said he was preoccupied . . . unable to concentrate in class. What's he up to?"

Screech hoped his face wasn't saying what he was thinking: *You'll never get me to rat on Zack.* "Uh, it's probably just some kind of freshman phase," he told Mike.

"Hmm," he said thoughtfully. "I suppose you could be right. I'm sure Zack will—"

Just then Zack came striding in, whistling "We're in the Money." He set his golf clubs against the wall and tossed a bag from the bookstore onto the kitchen counter. "Hey, Screech. Hey, Mike. Great day, huh?"

Mike looked carefully at Zack. "You're in a good mood, aren't you?"

"Yeah," said Screech. "How'd you do on the links?"

Zack grinned like a cat in a canary store with the owners on vacation. "Let's just say I scored big time. How goes the investment strategy, gentlemen?"

"Just fine," Screech answered. He nodded at the bag from the bookstore. "That another business book in there?"

"Business? Nothing so crude, my man. Architecture, that's my passion." Zack pulled out the book with a flourish.

"Golf, business, and architecture?" said Mike. "Zack, are you feeling all right? There is that flu bug going around. . . ."

"I'm fine, Mike," Zack assured him.

"Well, if you're sure." Mike thumped Screech on the back.

"Umph!" Screech said. "See you later."

"Architecture? This is a change in your recent routine, wouldn't you say?" Screech said when Mike had left.

"Hey, changes happen." Zack plopped down on the couch and started to flip through the book.

"We got a big assignment in chemistry class today," Screech said, leaning back in his chair. "You know, that class you missed, the one you always need help with?"

"I'm doing just fine with chemistry," Zack replied. "The people kind, the kind that matters. Walter Burke pretty much told me I've got an internship next summer at Burke Designs. And since you're not exactly the epitome of sartorial elegance, Screech, allow me to inform you that Burke Designs makes the best line of Ivy League fashions in the country."

Zack grinned, running a hand through his hair. "I'll be dressed for success."

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A little while later, Mike decided to pay Zack a surprise visit. Something was up, and he couldn't help feeling suspicious. It was only a month into the semester, but Mike already had Zack pegged as a scamster, not one for studying business or architecture.

Mike found Zack in the common room, eating popcorn, drinking coffee, and watching TV. Coffee and popcorn? Strange, but not too strange. The weird thing was the television program. The show's

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title was displayed on a wall behind two somber-looking commentators.

"On Wall Street?" Mike said. "Are you serious?"

Zack jotted down some notes, but didn't look up. "I think it's my favorite show," he said with conviction.

"What about MTV?"

Zack looked over at Mike, glassy-eyed. "Money television?"

"Forget it," Mike said, stunned. "You look like you need to get some sleep, buddy."

Zack nodded. "One of these days." He turned back to the TV. Mike started to tell Zack something else, then changed his mind. What could he say?

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"Hey, Sleeping Beauty! Get up. We gotta talk!"

Screech was sitting on the coffee table in the common room. It was getting late, and he was trying to wake Zack from a deep sleep. But just as Zack started to stir, Screech heard Leslie and Kelly coming down the hall, chatting excitedly. Not wanting to answer any more "What do you think about Zack" questions, Screech hustled into his room and shut the door.

"It's amazing how quiet Alex has been since Slater went to stay with his poker buddies," Kelly said, stepping into the suite.

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"Yeah, I'd think she was sick with the flu if I didn't know better."

Kelly yawned, pausing by the bedroom. "I'm beat, and it's going to be another big day at the health center tomorrow. Are you coming inside, Les?"

"I think I'll stay up and watch some TV," she replied. "See you in the morning."

Leslie turned on the set as Kelly disappeared into her bedroom. But when she turned around, she saw Zack sleeping quietly, a big coffee-table book resting on his chest. She lifted it up, careful not to wake him, and gave a squeal of delight.

Victorian Houses of San Francisco. She stole a glance at Zack, then gently pushed his legs over so she could sit down. "Zack, did you get this for me?"

No reply. He really was fast asleep. Leslie turned the pages slowly, digesting every single picture as thoroughly as possible. Every once in a while she'd "ooh" and "aah," and after one loud, "Look at that!" Zack finally woke up. He saw Leslie poring over the book and grinned. Then he closed his eyes again and pretended to sleep, letting Leslie read without interruption.

"Look at this last one!" she said quietly. "How magnificent!" She turned the page, finished the book with a satisfied sigh, then studied Zack's face. He was sleeping like a baby. She put the book aside, then gently kissed him on the lips.

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Suddenly, Zack was kissing her back.

"Zack!" Leslie jumped back. "You startled me!"

"That's strange," Zack said. "I was the one who was sleeping, remember?" He stretched his arm so it landed around her shoulder. "Do you like the book? It's for you."

"It is? Wow! I think I'm beginning to fall for you, Zack Morris."

"Good," Zack said, putting his other arm around her waist as he moved closer. "You know, it's a funny thing you're here. I was just dreaming about you."

"Oh? And what were you dreaming?"

"This," said Zack, edging in for another kiss.

"Brother!" Slater exclaimed, coming into the room like a whirlwind. "Preppie!" he said, spotting Zack and Leslie on the couch. "You've known me a long time. Do I snore or what?"

Zack leaned back and groaned. Another perfectly romantic mood was shattered.

Slater caught a better grip on the two pillows and blanket he was carrying. "One of my poker buddies says he can't stand rooming with somebody who snores," he fumed. "He said I should see a doctor to check if I've got a thing called a deviated septum—that's when your nose gets broken and the middle cartilage is pushed to one side or something."

Zack Zeroes In

"What a terrific idea," Zack grouched as he sat up. "Why don't you check it out right now?"

"Huh?" said Slater.

Leslie stood up and patted Zack's cheek. "That's okay, Zack. I'd better get to sleep, anyway." Picking up the book, she gave Zack a big smile.

"Thanks so much, Zack," she said.

"Thanks for what?" Slater asked as Leslie shut her door.

"I gave her some houses," Zack shuffled off to his room. "Slater, if you snore tonight you're sleeping on the couch."

"So you're saying I *do* snore?" Slater asked, but Zack was already in the room. "Hey, Zack. Yo, preppie!" No reply. Slater looked toward the girls' room and sighed. Just one thin wall between him and Alex once again. "Oh, great," he said to himself. "Home, sweet home!"

chapter 10

His first night back in the suite, and Slater was having trouble falling asleep. He kept thinking about Alex. It wasn't going to be fun sharing a suite with an angry ex-girlfriend. But that was the thing. Slater didn't want her to be an ex-girlfriend. At the very least, he wanted to be friends. And that meant something had to give.

Slater began to think of the situation in wrestling terms. He went into a mental crouch, circling Alex in his mind, ready to grab a solution as soon as he saw an opening, then do a takedown, and win the match.

Finally, at about two o'clock in the morning, an exhausted Slater realized that Alex wasn't the opponent. They'd simply had a misunderstanding. Someone just had to break through so things could get back to normal. And since he didn't hear Alex volunteering, Slater decided he'd have to do it himself.

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The next morning, Alex was pacing the sidewalk outside the drama building, waiting for her acting class to begin. She'd left the suite early to have breakfast by herself. She needed to think things over, because last night she'd heard Slater come back—to stay, it seemed. And for some reason, Alex couldn't stop smiling about it. Maybe now they'd be able to work things out.

Alex hadn't known Slater for very long, and they sure didn't have much in common. He didn't seem to understand acting, or why she wanted to do it. But they did have that instant connection. There was something special between them. They had a bond, and she didn't want to lose it.

Maybe she'd been concentrating too much on herself. Maybe she was taking these auditions too seriously, seeing everything in terms of rejection. She'd been so quick to take offense at the slightest comment . . . like Slater's crack about *The Bride of Frankenstein*. After all, Slater had just been kidding, and besides, hadn't Conrad Lerner agreed with him?

And what about Slater's feelings of insecurity? Well, she'd just have to convince him that he was the only one for her.

Right after class, she decided, she'd find Slater and talk things out. Maybe they could start over again. Alex glanced at her watch and gasped. She'd been so early for class, and now—with all this think-

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ing—she was going to be late. She hurried inside, heading for the theater.

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Slater glanced up at the ivy-covered drama building. "Okay," he said to himself. "You want to set things right? You want to understand why Alex loves acting so much? Well, you just go inside and see for yourself."

Still, Slater wasn't moving. He was nervous about seeing Alex. "Come on, guy," he said. "This is the easy part. The hard part comes after, when you actually talk to her and say you're sorry."

Slowly, Slater made his way inside. A few minutes later he was sitting in the top row of seats in the small campus theater, hoping Alex wouldn't spot him until after class. That's when he'd spring up, apologize, and everything would be all right.

Down near the stage, the instructor, Alan Johnson, was calling for everyone's attention. "As you well know," he was saying, "today is scene day. Each of you will perform a piece for class, then you will be critiqued." He checked his class list. "I think we'll start with Alex Tabor."

"Yes, Professor Johnson." Alex walked up to the stage. "I'm doing a monologue from *The Belle of Amberst*."

The Belle of Amberst was a one-woman play about the reclusive poet Emily Dickinson. Alex thought the

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character was perfect; since her breakup with Slater, she'd been feeling like a social outcast.

Suddenly, Alex caught sight of a figure in the top row. The curly hair, the strong build. It was Slater! Alex's heart jumped. Was this his way of saying he cared? Or was he here to spy—to see if she had anything going on with Bobby Fratello?

Alex realized that the instructor was talking to her.

"Excuse me?" she said. "I didn't catch that."

"I said, would you mind doing a different scene for me, Alex?"

"But how?" she asked, confused. "I don't have anything else prepared."

"Well, Conrad Lerner told me about an original scene you and Bobby Fratello did for him. About Eve and the vampire snake? Could we see that?"

Alex gulped. The love scene? She looked over at Bobby, who was smiling widely. Then she glanced at the back of the theater. She couldn't make out Slater's expression.

"Well," she told Alan Johnson. "I really don't—"

"Come on, Alex," the instructor urged. "You know how much I like to see original work."

The class joined in, applauding and cheering them on. Bobby jumped onstage beside her, and suddenly Alex didn't have a choice. She was swept up in the moment.

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"Eeevvve," Bobby hissed, starting the scene. He slithered toward her holding an imaginary apple. "I brought you something you'll like. I call it *apple*. Don't you just love its nice, bloody color?"

Up in the shadows, Slater wasn't laughing with the rest of the audience. He scowled, watching intently as the scene progressed, trying to figure out whether or not Alex was acting when she flirted with Bobby onstage. Was she Eve, the character? Or Alex, the girl? Before dating Alex, Slater never had trouble separating actors from their roles. But somehow, watching your girlfriend kiss another guy in the interest of drama was a different story altogether.

The whole thing was pretty upsetting, in fact. It seemed like Alex was in a totally different world. *So far away*, Slater thought. *So out of reach*. *So in another man's arms*.

The scene was almost over. Bobby and Alex were locked in an embrace, a prelude to a kiss. Suddenly, Slater made a decision. He had to leave. He just couldn't watch anymore. Stepping as quietly as he could, he pushed through the door and left the theater.

"It's eeeeasy," Bobby the vampire snake was telling Alex for their big finale. "You just move your neck like this . . ." Slowly, he turned her head, and Alex saw Slater was gone. A small tear slid down her cheek. ". . . and I give you a little bite on the neck!" Bobby said, finishing the sentence.

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The class went crazy. They stood and cheered, and even Professor Johnson said, "Very nice."

Bobby grinned as he and Alex took their bows. "Nice touch with the tear at the end," he said. "It was perfect!"

Alex tried to smile. The tear had nothing to do with acting—and everything to do with Slater.

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Screech was playing Chomp, a computer game, when Slater came back from class that afternoon. Slater watched silently for a few minutes, and then couldn't keep it in any longer. He had to tell someone about Alex.

"Can this wait?" Screech asked. "This is the first time I've made it past seventy thousand points, and I've still got three extra guys in reserve. This could be a new all-time high!"

"Fine." Slater sighed, collapsing on his bed. "I could be heading for an all-time low, but so what?"

Screech shut off the computer and swiveled around in his chair. "Okay, talk to me, Slater."

Slater didn't need another invitation. "How would you feel if you decided to patch things up with an ex-girlfriend, and before you even had time to talk everything through, you had to watch her kiss another guy? Or almost watch her kiss another guy—I couldn't bear to sit through it."

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Screech considered the situation. "I don't know," he said. "I'd need to have an ex-girlfriend first."

"Right. Let me rephrase the question. . . ."

"Hello, roomies," Zack said, coming in with a package and some letters. "Mail call!" He handed one letter to Slater, several others to Screech, then sat down on his bed and opened the package. "What's up, guys?"

"We were just talking about girls," Screech said, tearing open an envelope. "And now that the expert has arrived—meaning you, Zack—you can help Slater out with this Alex thing."

"Sure, sure. Boy, this came quickly," Zack said, looking at his new book.

"Another business book?" Slater stepped over to examine Zack's latest purchase. "*Mailroom to Boardroom in Twenty-five Easy Steps*?" he read. "I thought I had problems, preppie. This business thing of yours is getting way out of control."

"It's just a project I'm working on," Zack said, setting aside the book. "So how may I help you, my son? Let the Rajah of Romance assist you in matters of the heart."

Slater leaned against the wall and crossed his arms thoughtfully. "Okay, so how do you handle it when you're dating a girl and you see her in another guy's arms, about to kiss him passionately?"

"Hmm." Zack wrinkled his brow, considering

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the question carefully. "Never had that problem. Sorry." He picked up his book and began to read.

"Yeah, right," Slater said sarcastically.

Screech was looking over his visa bill. "This is weird," he said. "I've got a charge on my account from a computer service for an extra \$24.95, and I don't know why. I'll have to call my friendly representative." He picked up the phone and dialed a number.

"Come on, Zack," Slater pressed. "You might not be the Rajah of Romance, but you've gotta have some ideas what I can do about Alex." Slater gazed out the window thoughtfully. "Maybe I'm just jealous."

"Well, there you go," Zack said, watching warily as Screech pored over his visa bill and waited for someone to answer his call. "So you're jealous. Turn it around. Play hard to get. She'll either come after you or lose interest entirely. And if that's the end of it, there's lots of other fish in the sea."

"Is that why I'm drowning in confusion?" Slater asked in exasperation.

"That's all the more reason not to let it get to you." Zack stood up, not even sure what he was saying anymore. He was just trying to get to the door before Screech realized that he was responsible for the computer charge.

"Dun's Electronic Business Directory?" Screech said into the phone. "A printout of all the important

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businesses in the United States? I didn't order that!" He listened for a moment, then said, "Wait a minute. I'll have to call you back." He hung up, looking straight at Zack.

"Zack—" he began.

Just then Mike Rogers knocked on the bedroom door.

"Hey, Screech," he said, holding out a computer disk. "I'm having some trouble with this investment program you copied for me."

"I've got to do some research," Zack said, using the interruption to slip behind Mike's big bulk. "Remember, Slater, there're more important things than women to think about sometimes."

Mike put a beefy hand on Zack's shoulder to stop his progress. "Research? More important things than women? Are you sure you're feeling okay, Zack?" He checked Zack's forehead with an open palm. "Hmm. No fever."

"Wait! I've got to talk to you, Zack!" Screech said, trying to get around Mike as Zack broke away.

"Oh, excuse me, Screech." Mike politely stepped back so Screech could get through.

But it was too late. The common room was empty. "You can run, Zachary, but you can't hide!" Screech continued helplessly. "We're talking \$24.95 of illegal charges!"

Finally, he opened the door. "Corporate raider!" he yelled into the hall.

chapter 11

"What was that all about?" Mike asked.

Screech was too busy scrutinizing his VISA bill to answer. "I don't know why he didn't just tell me about it," he grumbled to himself.

"Maybe I should call my mom," Slater said, thinking out loud. "She was always good with romantic advice." He leaned back in bed, ignoring Mike.

Mike swiveled back and forth between Slater and Screech. Both seemed to have forgotten he was in the room. "Excuse me, did I just walk into the twilight zone?"

"Nope, no other weird charges," Screech said, looking up from his bill. "What was that, Mike?"

"Hey, contact!" Mike looked hopeful. "I asked why you were so upset with Zack."

"Oh, that. It's a long story."

Mike grabbed a chair and sat down. "So let's hear your long story. I don't think it's just my imagination that Zack's been acting more weird than usual these last few days."

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"Yeah, let's hear it." Slater sat up. "Maybe it'll take my mind off Alex."

Screech gulped, remembering his promise to Zack. He was still angry about the computer charge, but he was sure Zack had his reasons. Besides, Zack was his friend, right?

"Actually . . .," Screech paused as he tried to come up with an explanation, "it's a short story."

"Even if it's a one-line poem, I want to hear it," Mike said.

"Spill it, Screech," Slater demanded.

"Um . . ." Screech bit his lip. "Well . . ."

Mike and Slater leaned forward, looking serious and more than a teensy bit menacing.

"He's just been cramming so he can get a job next summer!" Screech blurted out. "He hasn't said anything because it isn't nailed down yet!"

"A summer job?" Mike quizzed. "Where, on Wall Street?"

Screech shrugged. He wasn't going to let that piece of news out. "Like I said, he doesn't have it completely nailed down yet." He held his breath, hoping the evasion would be enough.

"Want to help me get to the bottom of this?" Mike asked Slater. "Something about it still bugs me."

"Might as well," Slater grinned. "Let's grab Screech and squeeze him till he confesses!"

Mike laughed. "Now *there's* an idea! But first

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"I've got to ask him some questions." He held up the disk. "Now, about my investments . . ."

Outside the guys' room, Zack had his ear pressed against the door, listening. He'd decided to come back and talk to Screech about the computer charge. But when he heard Mike and Slater discussing one Zack Morris, he thought he should wait and hear what they said. He knew they were kidding about physically squeezing info out of Screech. But still, they were obviously hot on his trail. Both of them. And he didn't like being ganged up on. Uh-oh. It was sort of quiet in the room now. Maybe they *were* going through with the big squeeze!

"Are we missing anything?" Kelly was standing by his left shoulder. She'd just come in with Leslie and Alex, and Zack had been so busy concentrating, he hadn't even noticed.

Zack jumped back from the door and grinned nervously. "Oh, hi, girls! I was trying to tell if anyone was sleeping before I went inside."

"How do you *bear* people sleeping?" Leslie asked, puzzled.

"Are you kidding? Slater's the last remaining snore-asaurus."

Alex put down her books. "So, is Slater in there?" she asked.

"Yep," Zack replied, going toward the fridge. "Why don't you go inside and talk things over with him?"

"That's the last thing I want to do. I was only

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asking so that I can avoid him. Do you know he actually came to my acting class to spy on me—then had the nerve to leave before my scene was over? He's nothing but an insecure, overwrought, muscle-headed boob!"

"Sheesh." Zack was poking his head inside the refrigerator, so his voice came out muffled. "Maybe you shouldn't go in there after all."

"I have to read over some scenes, anyway," Alex said, calming down a little. "I'll be in our room."

Kelly reached around Zack to grab a soda. "I've got homework, too. I'll join you."

Zack closed the fridge and looked over at Leslie. "Not a thing to eat in the whole place. Want to go grab a pizza?"

"I don't know." Leslie gave a little cough. "I've been feeling funny this afternoon, and think I could use some rest. I don't want to catch that flu bug."

"Don't worry," Zack said, gently maneuvering Leslie toward the door. "Mama's Pizza has a new chicken and garlic pizza with jalapeños. No germ can survive that."

"Are you sure *we* can?" Leslie said, reaching for Zack's hand.

Leslie and Zack walked slowly through campus, the breeze blowing Leslie's hair softly from her face. Pretty autumn leaves fell around them like a gentle rain. Zack couldn't have asked for a more romantic setting.

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"I just *love* that book you gave me," Leslie was saying as they left the grounds.

Zack turned to Leslie and smiled. Her eyes caught the glow from the setting sun, and Zack thought she never looked more beautiful. "Whatever makes you happy makes me happy," he said.

Leslie put an arm around his shoulders and gave him a quick squeeze. "You sort of amaze me, Zack," she confessed. "When I first met you, I thought you were one of those smooth-talking guys who went through girls like a Wild West gunslinger, adding little notches on your gun."

Zack laughed nervously. "You did, huh?"

Leslie took his hand. Swinging it back and forth, she laughed. "You've gotta admit, things are different in college. You don't know what to expect, really. And people change. I mean, Kelly was your girlfriend in high school, and here I am her roommate, with all of us living in the same suite." She stepped off the sidewalk, gathered up an armful of leaves, and tossed them into the air. "Can you imagine the reaction that would have caused at the turn of the century?"

"They'd probably have burned down the building."

"Speaking of buildings . . ." Leslie took his hand again as they continued walking. "I keep meaning to tell you about my uncle in San Francisco. He buys

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old houses, fixes them up, and sells them. I'm pretty sure he did a couple of the ones in that book."

"Bet that takes big bucks."

"Well—"

"Look! There's the restaurant!" Zack cried, remembering how much Leslie hated to talk about money.

Leslie squinted. "Where?"

"Can't you see it? It's just two blocks away."

Like the Roxy Movie Theater, Mama's Pizza had been a favorite at Cal U for decades. Its real name was Mama's Ristorante and Genuine Italian Pizza Palace, but everyone just called it Mama's.

"Mama" Seraso, the owner, loved her customers and always greeted each guest at the door. But her favorite customers were young couples—especially if she thought they were falling in love.

"I play some special music just for you," Mama said as she personally escorted Zack and Leslie to a cozy corner table near the fireplace. She made sure their order was taken right away, then she turned to Zack and winked. "You like old music? Forties, big band? Romantic stuff, ah?"

"I swear I didn't plan this," Zack told Leslie as Mama bustled off.

"That's okay," Leslie said quietly. "Sometimes things just work out really well."

"I sure hope so," Zack replied, crossing his legs under the table for luck.

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Oh boy, he thought. Here he was with Leslie Burke, having an incredibly romantic evening . . . a magical evening. *But how magical would it be if she knew how I'd been scheming to get a job with her father? Would it all disappear in a puff of smoke?*

Would she even *like* the idea of him working for Walter Burke? Would she think he was after the Burke money, instead of the Burke daughter? But the daughter wanted a man with money—she practically said so herself!

Zack sighed. There was no way around it. He couldn't tell her the truth. Not yet, anyway. He liked her too much to blow it.

"Zack? Zack, I need to talk to you."

"Sorry, Les, guess I was just daydreaming. What is it? Anything serious?"

"I'm not sure, but I've been meaning to mention something to you." Leslie stopped for a moment. This wasn't the easiest thing for her to talk about.

"So, mention," Zack urged.

"I talked to my father this afternoon," she said slowly.

Gulp! Uh-oh! Danger, danger!

The waiter came over with their sodas, and Leslie paused once more.

The suspense was killing Zack.

"He really likes you," Leslie continued, swirling the straw around in her drink.

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"Is that good or bad?"

Leslie frowned, then smiled self-consciously. "I don't really know. He's never liked anyone I've dated . . . if that's what we're doing," she added shyly. "Dating."

Zack knew there was an opening in there somewhere, but he wanted to get back to her father.

"So what did he say about me, Les?"

Oh, no! Was that too direct?

Over the sound system, a big-band tune was beginning to play. Leslie listened a moment, not saying anything. Then she half smiled. "They say the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Well, a lot of times the way to a girl's heart is through her daddy. You wouldn't be trying to impress my father now, would you?" she asked, her eyes turning serious.

"Here's your order," the waiter said, stepping up to their table with a steaming pizza. He put the pizza in place, then served each of them a slice. "Enjoy!"

Zack sniffed his plate, then coughed. "Whoa! I think Mama put extra garlic on it!" he exclaimed.

"Here," Leslie said, exchanging plates. "He gave me one from your side. This piece has jalapeños."

As he began to eat, Zack's mind raced a mile a minute. Had Walter Burke told Leslie about the summer internship? He hadn't told Zack that he had the job for sure. What would Leslie think? After all,

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she'd already been hoodwinked once this term by someone who just wanted to get close to the Burke fortune. That conniving senior Phil . . .

"Skylark . . ." sang Linda Ronstadt in a modern cover of the old big-band hit, "have you seen a valley green in spring?"

"Interesting choice of music," Leslie remarked, "considering our conversation."

Zack gagged on a jalapeño. He grabbed a napkin, coughed a few times, then took a long drink of soda. Finally he nodded, indicating that he was back to normal.

"So Daddy said you have a financial knowledge that's very unusual for a college freshman," Leslie continued.

Zack's face turned bright red.

"You're all right, aren't you?" she asked, concerned.

"Never better!" Zack wiped his mouth and took another drink of soda.

"Now," said Leslie. "You never read business magazines or followed the stock market before you met my father. Does he have anything to do with your sudden devotion to economics?"

Was it Zack's imagination, or was Leslie starting to sound suspicious?

"Uh, what did he tell you?" Zack had to find out what Leslie knew!

Leslie's eyes narrowed. "Daddy doesn't talk

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about things. He just does them. I'm asking you, Zack. For the truth."

So Leslie didn't know about the summer internship. He didn't have to admit a thing! On the other hand, she was asking him to be honest. Well, he'd tell her the truth—every bit of it—when the time was right. For now, he'd just tell *some* of it.

Zack put down his soda and raised his hands in a mock surrender. "Okay, I confess," he began. "Remember *Meet Me in St. Louis*? Well, I went because I was interested in you, not because I wanted to see the movie."

"That's your big confession? I didn't have to be Nancy Drew to figure that one out."

"Well, some stuff you said after the movie got me thinking. Then I met your dad, played golf with him, and learned a little bit about how he's gotten ahead in life and ..." Zack paused, choosing his words carefully. "... well, let's just say I'm going to major in economics. And since I haven't exactly been serious about things till now, I've just thrown myself into it, trying to catch up."

"I'm amazed," Leslie said. "I actually believe you. I think."

"Economics is basically simple." Zack was trying to press his advantage. "You give something and you get something in return. And as long as you give as much as you get, you're fine."

"Like love," Leslie suggested. But then, before

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things got too romantic, she added, "And this all started just from seeing that movie?"

"Well, Screech turned me on to something, too. Your dad seemed pretty interested in it, also. There's this thing called the Elliot wave—"

"Stop!" Leslie held up a hand. "I'm like my mom, Zack. I get sick of hearing about business."

"Okay," Zack agreed quickly.

Leslie leaned forward and brushed a hair from Zack's eye. "I'm sorry to keep asking you this, Zack, but I need to make sure: You and Daddy just talked economics when you were playing golf? You didn't talk about Burke Enterprises? Or me?"

Zack twisted the truth. "Yeah, pretty much."

Just then the waiter returned with their check. "Will there be anything else?" he asked.

Zack looked at Leslie, who shook her head. "That's all," he told the waiter. He reached for his wallet, then he scrambled around frantically.

"Is something wrong?" Leslie asked.

What a time for this to happen! "This is terrible," he moaned.

"What is it?" Leslie asked, her voice rising with concern.

"Would you mind?" Zack asked sheepishly as he pushed the check across the table. "I forgot my wallet."

chapter 12

Kelly Kapowski had decided to attend Cal U later than the rest of her suitemates. But with Zack's help she'd managed to get into the legendary Archeology 101 course, usually taught by Eustus "Huey" Wilson, an Indiana Jones type of professor. Unfortunately, Huey was on an expedition in Outer Mongolia. That left his father, seventy-nine-year-old retired professor Eustus Wilson Sr., to fill in for his famous offspring. And Professor Wilson Sr. was nothing at all like Indiana's dad.

The class was boring, so Kelly understood why Zack was reading a book instead of paying attention. But it was an economics textbook, and Zack wasn't taking one business course. Last night Leslie had told her that Zack had settled on a major—economics—and was getting serious about it. That explained some of it. But still, Kelly had known Zack a long time, and she'd never known him to study.

Why was Zack suddenly Mr. Bookworm? And what about all this coffee drinking?

Watching Zack in class made Kelly even more

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curious. So when the bell finally rang and everyone filed into the hallway, she took the opportunity to probe.

"I see you're really into business studies these days," she told Zack. "Leslie says you might even major in economics."

"More than might," Zack replied. "Actually, I've got some big things lined up, and they're not all in the classroom."

They reached the end of the long hallway, and Zack stepped ahead, holding open the door for Kelly.

"Thanks," she said, walking through. "So what kind of things do you have lined up? Anything beneficial to your roommates?"

"What's the matter, Kel?" Zack joked. "Afraid I'll forget where I came from when I'm a millionaire?"

"No, I wasn't wondering that, but now that you brought it up, would you?"

There's more to this than deciding a major, Kelly reasoned. Zack was up to something. He was *always* up to something, but this time it was something big, and she was dying to know what it was.

She needed to get Zack talking to satisfy her curiosity. "Want a cup of hot chocolate?" she asked. "I'll buy."

Zack stopped, resting one foot on a concrete bench to tie his shoelace. "You'll buy?" He frowned a little, then started walking again with Kelly trailing

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behind. "Are you after something, Kelly? Some information? Everyone's been so curious about what I've been up to, it's getting annoying."

"Zack! This is me, *Kelly*. How can you have big changes happen in your life and not expect me to notice?"

Zack grinned. "Fair enough." They reached the door of the Fledgling, a sandwich shop on campus. Zack held open the door and showed her a book. "See this?"

"*How to Nail the Other Guy before He Nails You?* You've got to be kidding."

"I admit it's a pretty serious title, but the world of business *is* pretty serious, Kelly. When we were at Bayside, all I thought about was how to goof off more efficiently."

"That's not *all* you thought about, as I recall," Kelly said with a smile.

"Okay, that and girls—mostly you," Zack conceded as he followed her inside. "But I never thought about the future. Walter Burke changed all that."

"Really? I want to hear all about it. I mean, your reading material isn't exactly my idea of something for a cozy afternoon, but I've never seen you so fired up before."

Zack offered to get the hot chocolate, and Kelly watched him as he stood in line to pay. The last time she'd seen him this obsessed with anything was the

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time he'd run against their friend Jessie for class president at Bayside High. That time, the motivation had been a trip to Paris with the principal and some school officials. Did Zack have a particular motivation now? Did it have something to do with Leslie?

"I'll tell you a secret," Zack said when they were sitting in a corner booth. He looked around to make sure no one was listening, then narrowed his eyes. "There's a very good chance I'll be the new intern at Burke Designs next summer. Do you have any idea what that means?"

Burke Designs? *Bingo!* Motivation city. Kelly was surprised to feel a bit jealous at the news, and what it might ultimately mean. "Well, I guess that can only help your designs on Leslie."

"I hope so, Kelly. And thanks for understanding. You're the only one who really knows me—I mean, you didn't jump to the conclusion that I was after the Burke bucks. You jumped to the conclusion that I'm after Leslie!"

Zack draped an arm across the back of the booth and drained his hot chocolate. "But that doesn't change the facts. I figure by the time I graduate I'll go right into a six-figure job with full benefits and a lock on a perfect career." He tapped his empty cup on the wooden table for emphasis. "How's that?"

Kelly sat there silently, trying to digest everything Zack had said. It was amazing. Not only was

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he serious about school, but he had his whole life mapped out. And since he'd be working for Burke Enterprises, no doubt it would include matrimonial bliss with her roommate Leslie Burke.

Kelly wanted to be happy for him, she really did. But for some reason, memories of their high school romance kept leaping up at her, and her old feelings for Zack seemed to be coming back full force. She tried to push them down—she and Zack were just good friends now—and forced herself to smile.

"You've certainly got it all planned out," she managed to reply. "What can I say?"

"Nothing to anyone," Zack cautioned, checking his watch. He stood up and began gathering his books. "After that Phil Skylark incident, the *last* thing I want is Leslie thinking I'm dating her to get to her father. Can I trust you, Kelly?"

"Sure you can," Kelly said, slipping out of her seat. She wrapped her arms around herself for warmth, suddenly feeling a chill. "Where are you off to? Another class?"

"I'm ditching class to check the stock reports." Zack was already at the door, waving good-bye.

"Stock reports?" Kelly said to herself, puzzled. "Wow, this is serious."

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It was already dark when Kelly finished her last class and headed back to the dorm. All afternoon,

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she'd sat through her lectures trying to listen. But those old memories kept flooding back like TV reruns. There was the first time she met Zack. The first time they kissed. The fights they had. The adventures they shared. Now, here she was, living across a common room from him with two other girls, and one of those girls was the love of his life.

Or was she? Whatever the case, Zack was apparently on a first-name basis with Leslie's multimillionaire father and was planning out his entire future with the family.

Given her own situation, Kelly found the whole thing depressing. She liked Leslie, and of course she liked Zack. But did she really like them together? What would become of her, Kelly Kapowski, while Zack and Leslie led the good, easy life? She could see them now: They'd have a house in San Francisco, one in Beverly Hills, and then there'd be the ski hideaway in Colorado, or the beach house in Hawaii.

And how would she end up? What did she have, besides her work at the Student Health Center? Back in her room, Kelly put her head on her desk and closed her eyes.

"Five more broken hearts," mumbled the old, balding physician who volunteered at the Kapowski Clinic for the Terminally Loveless. He looked over at some medical charts and shook his head sadly. "That's what killed 'em all. Broken hearts!"

"How can you be so sure?" Kelly asked, putting

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her graying head on the rickety, old desk and sobbing.

"I checked the files. Each one of them had a high school boyfriend—and that was all. They never dated again. Ever."

Slowly, the battered clinic desk turned back into Kelly's real one. She shook the bizarre, troubling visions from her head. The whole thing made Kelly feel creepy. "A cup of tea," she said out loud. "That should settle my nerves."

Leslie was already in the kitchen, boiling a pot of water. "Great," Kelly told her. "I was just about to do that."

"I know. Tea should really hit the spot," Leslie sneezed. "This bug has been taking its time getting to me, but I'm afraid it's just about here."

"So," Leslie continued. "How were your classes today?"

"All right," Kelly replied. "Archeology was boring, as usual."

"Did Zack show up? He's been missing so many classes lately. I wonder if something's wrong."

The teakettle whistled. Kelly busied herself getting the tea and cookies together and didn't answer.

"Kelly? I asked you a question. What do you think is going on with Zack?"

Kelly hesitated. Now what was she supposed to do? She'd promised Zack not to tell anyone about

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his summer internship, and she certainly didn't want to hurt Leslie's feelings.

She decided to do what Zack would do in similar circumstances. She wouldn't lie—she'd just evade.

"Oh, you know, Les, it's probably what you were saying before. Everybody picks a major sooner or later. I guess Zack just got a jump on the rest of us and is moving full speed ahead."

"Yes, but I'm beginning to think this business thing isn't just a decision about a degree, Kelly. It's an obsession."

Kelly reached for a cookie and nibbled nervously. "Well, if you knew Zack as long as I have, you'd realize he can be an obsessive kind of guy."

Leslie stood there, considering Kelly's words. She took a sip of tea, then set her cup and saucer down on the counter. "Maybe it's just my dad. He tends to have a strong effect on people. Not always a good effect, but a strong one."

"I think you're right," Kelly said, hoping she wasn't giving too much away.

Leslie leaned forward. "What do you mean by that? Did you and Zack talk about it?"

"Um . . ." *Evasion worked once, so why not try it again?* "We talked after class a little. But you forget, I met your father."

"But he hardly spoke to you."

Why did Leslie have to question every little

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thing? "Yeah, but working at the clinic, I've learned to be observant." Kelly rinsed out her cup, her back to Leslie. She really didn't like all this dishonesty. No wonder criminals always looked so nervous!

"Sorry, Kelly, I'm just uptight, I guess," Leslie said, rising from her chair. "It's just that with Zack Morris you really have to pay attention to the details."

That's certainly true, Kelly thought, remembering Zack's high school schemes. "That reminds me of the time we were all seniors, back at Bayside, when I started dating another guy at the diner where I worked." Kelly paused to look her roommate straight in the eye. "Before I tell you the story though, let me say, Zack's the kind of guy you have to—"

The door opened suddenly, and Zack stepped into the room. Kelly caught herself, just in time.

"Zack's the kind of guy you have to what?" asked Zack, setting his books on the counter.

"I was just going to, uh, tell Leslie about this thing that happened when we were all at Bayside," Kelly answered.

Zack shot Kelly a sharp look. "A story about Bayside? Boy, there must be *nothing* on TV."

"Well, it doesn't really matter. Anyway, I have lots of studying to do," Kelly said quickly, moving toward her room. "Bye, Zack."

A minute later, Zack came into the bedroom, closing the door behind him. "So what old story from Bayside did you bring up, Kel? Something that

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reminds you of my plans for summer vacation? This doesn't look good."

Kelly put down her book. "It's not what you think, Zack." How could she tell him she was remembering their good times . . . and missing them? "I would never betray your confidence."

"Now, why don't I believe you?" Zack said, looking at her doubtfully.

Kelly couldn't understand it. Here she'd been evading the truth left and right with Leslie. But now she was being honest, and Zack didn't believe her.

"Zack, wait! I can explain everything!"

But she didn't get the chance. Zack had already left.

chapter 13

Screech woke up early the next morning, pulled on his bathrobe, and stumbled into the common room. He was tired because he hadn't slept well. Slater had been snoring up a storm, and Screech was really starting to worry about Zack. Was keeping his potential summer job a secret still in his friend's best interest? Screech wasn't so sure.

Point number one: Zack was spending most of his time studying business books and ignoring his real workload. Point number two: He wasn't getting enough sleep and was acting like a zombie. Point number three: He was ditching lots of classes, and there were only so many days you could miss in one semester and still get a passing grade.

A great summer job was one thing, but what good would it do if Zack flunked out of college? Screech had to have a serious talk with his buddy right away. It was of the utmost importance. The number one priority. Except for the fact that Zack would probably get mad at him.

Well, maybe he'd catch a little television, and

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then tell Zack. Munching on a cold bagel, Screech strolled over to the TV. But there Zack was, fast asleep on the couch, a paperback book resting on his face.

Screech read the title out loud. "*Business through the Back Door*. Oh, brother." Screech shoved the bagel in the pocket of his robe. *Guess there's no time like the present*, he thought, nudging Zack.

Zack mumbled irritably and turned on his side.

Screech persisted. "Mike and Slater want to know why you're missing classes, Zack." No response.

"I think you should tell Leslie what you're really up to with Mr. Burke." Still no response.

Screech reached into his other robe pocket and pulled out his lucky Susan B. Anthony silver dollar. "Okay. Heads I tell them, tails I don't." That didn't even get a grumble. Screech flipped the coin.

Suddenly, a slender hand reached out, grabbing the dollar in midflight. Screech swiveled around sharply. Leslie Burke—looking annoyed—was standing next to him.

"Oh, hi, Les," Screech said, trying to act nonchalant. "I was just, uh . . ."

"I heard what you just uh," she replied, pulling Screech into the kitchen area. "Okay, Samuel," she whispered insistently. "I've noticed Zack's been blowing off a lot of classes, too. And since I just heard you say this has something to do with my

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father, I believe I deserve an explanation. I want the truth. Now."

"But . . ."

"No buts!" Leslie said. "Full disclosure, Screech."

"Not here," Screech said, nodding toward Zack. "Let's go into the bedroom." Steering Leslie through the door, Screech hoped he'd come up with a way to get out of this mess—and fast.

Inside, Slater was pulling books out from under Zack's bed and piling them on the floor nearby.

"Morning," Slater placed the last book on the pile. "Look what I found! My high school ring rolled under Zack's bed, and when I went to get it, I saw all these books. And every single one is about business stuff."

Slater was so caught up with his discovery, he didn't ask why Leslie was in the room, or think anything of the fact that he was still in his underwear.

Then, finally, realization struck. "Leslie!" he cried, ripping the comforter from Zack's bed and wrapping himself up tight. "What are you doing in our room? And where's Zack?" He glanced back and forth from Screech to Leslie. "Wait a minute. Don't tell me you two are . . ."

"Oh, grow up," Leslie snapped. "Zack's sleeping in the common room." She gripped Screech's arm. "I'm here because Screech had some interesting things to say that we need to explore further. Right, Screech?"

Just then Alex burst into the room. "Slater! I just

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had the most horrible nightmare. Frankenstein's monster was chasing me, and there were all these zombies. . . ." Alex trailed off, looking confused. "What's going on, a pajama party?" She blushed. "I didn't mean to interrupt . . . I was just scared . . . and thought . . ."

Slater pulled the comforter around himself even tighter. "And thought you'd come to me?" he finished in a stern voice. But Alex looked so pretty in her plaid flannel nightgown, what guy could resist? "I'm glad, Alex," he added warmly.

"My throat feels sore! Must be that flu bug!" Screech cried suddenly, seeing his chance for escape. He scooted into the bathroom and locked the door.

"Screech, come back here!" Leslie exclaimed.

The only response was a loud gargling sound from behind the door.

Alex stepped closer to Slater. It was funny that when she was scared Slater was the first person she'd come to for some security. "Maybe we can talk later?" she said hopefully. "I have to practice for my audition this morning, but maybe we can get together this afternoon?"

Slater smiled, taking a step toward Alex. He was hoping to seal the date with a kiss, but he stumbled on the edge of the comforter. Reaching behind his back to steady himself, Slater accidentally hit the playback button on Zack's answering machine. The message began to play, and everyone listened in.

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Even Screech cautiously stuck his head out of the bathroom.

"Good-morning, Zack!" boomed the voice of Walter Burke. "It's 7:00 A.M., and I've just made a bundle on the stock market, thank you very much! You're zeroing in on a big payoff, young man! Or should I say 'summer intern'?"

"Uh-oh," Screech said.

"Now *that's* interesting," said Slater.

"Yes, isn't it?" Leslie declared angrily, shooting a glance at Screech. "I guess that means Zack's going to work for Daddy. Do you have anything to say, Screech?"

"Uh, yeah. I forgot to take my decongestant!" Screech ducked back into the bathroom and locked the door.

"I can wait!" Leslie said, folding her arms across her chest.

Slater, meanwhile, had pulled the comforter over his head like a tent and was fumbling underneath. A few minutes later, he emerged wearing a jogging suit. "I'll walk you outside, Alex," he said, taking her arm. He cast a wary eye at Leslie. "Before the hurricane hits."

Leslie was too preoccupied to hear Slater's comment. "Come out of there, Screech, you coward!"

"I never claimed to be a superhero!" Screech shouted from behind the closed door.

Leslie walked over and tapped her long nails

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menacingly against the wood frame. "Well, you're going to get clawed by Catwoman unless you show your face!"

A loud gargling sound came from the bathroom again.

"Screech, you just . . ." Leslie stopped herself and sighed. "Oh, forget it! I'll just go straight to the horse's mouth." Gathering her resolve, she turned, pushed open the door to the common room, and marched right over to Zack.

Zack was still fast asleep, the business book covering his face. Leslie lifted the book and saw Zack's peaceful expression, his mouth opening and shutting with every breath.

Well, I'll wipe that look right off his face, Leslie thought, trying to figure out exactly what to say.

Suddenly her throat felt dry, and she coughed quietly. She needed some orange juice. Moving quietly now, not wanting to wake Zack just yet, Leslie went into the kitchen and poured herself a glass of juice. She took a small sip, then, all at once, had an idea.

Leslie padded back to the couch. Then she waited for just the right moment, took aim, and poured orange juice into Zack's open mouth.

Arms waving wildly, sputtering like Daffy Duck, Zack rolled to the floor, overturning the coffee table. He scrambled to his feet, gagging and choking. Then he saw Leslie—looking cool, calm, collected, and *mad*.

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"Morning, Les," he managed to choke out. "What happened?"

"So sorry, Zack," she replied, sounding anything but. "I was just curious about this book you had over your face. I must have spilled my orange juice when I bent down to look at it."

Still coughing, Zack nodded his head. Something about the apology seemed off, but, hey, Zack was a nice guy; he was willing to give her the benefit of the doubt.

"I was up late reading," Zack explained, wiping the juice from his face. "Your, uh, . . . dad recommended that book."

"Daddy recommended it? Well, that makes sense," Leslie tossed the book at Zack. "I guess you two can discuss it when you start your internship."

"Yeah, maybe—what?" Zack dropped the book when he realized what Leslie was saying. "What do you mean?"

"Daddy left a message on your machine," Leslie replied. "Slater accidentally played it while I was in your room this morning with Screech and Alex."

"You and Alex were in my room with Slater and Screech? What was that all about? And why was Slater playing *my* answering machine?" Zack was confused and a little peeved.

"Like I said," Leslie replied, "it was an accident."

Zack frowned. Her tone of voice seemed odd.

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Strained. Something was wrong. "An accident? You mean like the orange juice?" Zack sat back on the couch, determined to play it cool. "Mind telling me what this is really all about?" he asked.

"I should ask *you* that. On the message, Daddy mentioned you were in for a 'big payoff.' Care to explain that one, *summer intern*?"

Zack was in hot water. How could he possibly explain it all? On the surface it seemed so incriminating. Dating Leslie. Using her to get the summer internship. Chatting up her dad. It *was* incriminating! For the first time in his life, Zack couldn't think of one thing to say.

"Your father . . ." he said haltingly.

"Don't worry," Leslie said angrily. "I won't tell him anything, if that's what you're so concerned about. I'd be too embarrassed. Do you have anything *else* to say for yourself?"

Zack gulped. Nothing was coming to mind.

"Just as I thought!" said Leslie, turning on her heels and leaving. "You can't talk your way out of this one, Zack Morris. In fact, I don't want you talking to me at all!"

Just then Screech shuffled into the room. "I didn't say a thing! I swear I didn't, Zack!"

"I believe you," Zack said, his head in his hands. "I'm just not sure I follow the whole story."

Screech sat down and eagerly started talking.

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"It's really simple. You see, Slater was looking under your bed and found your books—"

"You mean Slater was snooping? Under my bed?"

"No, not at all. You see—"

"Tell me about the answering machine," Zack interrupted.

"Okay. Leslie, Slater, Alex, and I were all standing there, listening . . ." He trailed off when he saw Zack's face.

"I get it. You all invaded my privacy—every last one of you. You listened to my messages, went through my things, and talked about me behind my back. Even Kelly, the sweetest, nicest girl in the world, turned against me. And now, everything is ruined with Leslie. What kind of friends are you guys, anyway? I've had enough!"

Zack strode into the bedroom, leaving a shell-shocked Screech in the middle of the common room. A minute later Zack came back out, carrying a blanket, two pillows, and a suitcase stuffed with clothes.

"Zack, where are you going?" said Screech, finally finding his voice.

"I have some poker buddies on another floor. I think I'll pay them an extended visit."

"Zack, really, you can't leave like this. You can work things out with Leslie. I know you can."

But Screech was talking to an empty room.

Chapter 14

When Zack didn't come back that night, Screech decided to fight fire with fire, that is, business with business. He'd heard about a book called *A Book of Five Rings*. It was written by a samurai warrior as a sort of handbook for war and strategies, and Screech knew businessmen used it for tips on negotiating, organizing, and general wheeling and dealing.

That morning, Screech went straight to the library and found the only copy. "You have very interesting taste in reading material," the librarian told him, checking out the book, along with *The Challenge of Nuclear Physics*; *Your Finances, Yourself*; and *How to Meet Girls*.

"Well, I'm an interesting guy," Screech said. "I'm just waiting for everyone else to figure that out."

A few hours later, Screech called an official suite meeting. Slater, Alex, Kelly—and even Leslie—all faced him as he stood behind the kitchen counter, pounding a spoon as if it were a gavel.

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"Now," said Screech, "I've gone through this book"—he held up *A Book of Five Rings*—"and believe I've found a strategy that will get Zack to move back into the suite." Screech passed around copies of the chapter titled "Glue and Lacquer Emulsion Body."

"Basically, it advises you to stick to your enemy like glue. Let's say Zack is our enemy. That means we should stay after him. Do anything and everything it takes to win back his friendship. Any questions?"

"Yes," said Leslie, standing up and tossing the Xerox in the garbage. "Why would I want to do that?"

"Any other questions?" Screech said as Leslie left the room. "No? So the rest of us agree, we'll do it?"

Everyone nodded, not exactly overwhelmed by General Screech.

"Who'll go first?" asked Screech.

"You!" said Slater, Alex, and Kelly at the same time.

■ ■ ■

Mike had told Screech that Zack was staying with his friend Tony. So, Screech knew the "where" part of his strategy. It was the "when" part that was worrying him. He needed to choose a time when Zack was alone and feeling reflective. Maybe after a big meal.

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That night, right after dinner, Screech knocked on Tony's door. Tony answered and waved Screech inside.

Ob, no, thought Screech, looking around. *Not a good time.* Zack was sitting at a table, playing poker with a bunch of guys.

"What do you want?" Zack asked coolly.

Screech ducked his head, embarrassed to be groveling in front of so many people. But if that's what it took to stick like glue...

"I came to apologize," Screech began. "We were really out of line, getting into your personal life like that."

"Two cards," Zack told the dealer, ignoring Screech.

"Plus there's a new Elliot wave theory guy I found out about last night on CompuServe," Screech continued. "I could get you a printout, if you want."

Zack peered at his new hand and kept quiet.

"I'm not the only one who's sorry," Screech offered. "The whole suite feels bad—especially Leslie." Screech wasn't too sure about that one, but it *could* be true.

"Really?" Zack said quickly, putting down his cards. "Did she say that?"

"Hey!" Tony sounded annoyed. "Are you playing cards here or what?"

"I fold," said Zack, pulling Screech into a corner.

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"You know, Zack, we all did what we did because we were worried about you."

"I appreciate it, Screech. But I'm still a little hurt. Your personal apology doesn't cover the whole gang. Anyway, you'd better get going. I can't waste any more time. After this game I have some stock tables to go over."

"You mean you're still trying for this summer intern thing?"

Zack nodded. "What else do I have left?"

■ ■ ■

After hearing Screech's report, Slater decided to wait until he was on duty at the Falcon's Nest before smoothing things out. Zack always came by on Thursdays after phys ed, and he usually came alone. It was the perfect time to try to call a truce.

Thursday afternoon, Zack walked into the restaurant, right on schedule.

"Coffee's on the house," Slater said, coming over to Zack's table with a steaming cup.

Zack was busy estimating profits from his summer internship, punching numbers into a pocket calculator and staring at the screen as if Slater wasn't even there.

"Anything on the menu is on me, preppie," Slater offered.

Zack snapped his fingers, added more figures to the total, then nodded to himself.

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Still, Slater pressed on. "Hey, Zack, remember that time at Bayside when we ditched class to meet those Swedish girls in Malibu? Remember how I paid for everything, including your speeding ticket? We had some great times, didn't we, old buddy?"

Zack picked up the small silver pitcher, discovered there was no cream left, then grabbed one from the next table. He poured some half and half in his coffee, stirred it, and sipping nonchalantly, looked right through Slater.

"Okay, what's it going to cost to make this right with you?"

Finally, Zack looked over at Slater, pretending to notice him for the first time. "Oh, Slater! Were you talking to me?"

"Yeah," Slater repeated. "What's it going to cost me to get your forgiveness?"

"Let's see," said Zack, tapping some buttons on the calculator. "You're the one who was looking under my bed, right?"

"Right," Slater admitted reluctantly.

Zack punched in more numbers. "And you're the one who was playing *my* answering machine, correct?"

"I'm lower than the belly of a worm," Slater replied. "So what's the damage?"

Zack tapped in more figures. And then some more.

"Okay, I'm lower than the belly of a worm buried

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beneath a frozen layer of the Alaskan tundra. Just make it within reason, okay? I'm not rich."

Finally, Zack pressed the total button and nodded his head. "The way I figure it, if you supply lunch, including apple pie à la mode, we'll be just about even."

Slater smiled. "Okay, deal. I'll take it out of my salary. I'm sorry, Zack."

"Fine, then," Zack reached out and shook Slater's hand.

"Want your usual?" Slater asked. "Double cheeseburger and fries? Or did you want onion rings?"

Zack grinned. "Today I want a steak, medium well, with the house salad. And I think I'll start with an appetizer or two. Thanks for the apology, roomie!"

■ ■ ■

Next in line to apologize were Kelly and Alex. The two of them had come up with a great idea—a surefire way to soothe Zack's ruffled feathers. And even though Alex was going to be doing the actual "number" on Zack, both girls had worked long and hard on the routine.

The next morning, Alex and Kelly were hiding in the stairwell of the science building. They knew Zack's chemistry class was just down the hall, and if they timed it right, their apology would be under

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way in a matter of minutes. Alex tugged her long overcoat closed and crossed her fingers. "I hope this works," she whispered to Kelly.

Just then the bell rang, and students filled the hall. Kelly peered out cautiously. "He's coming!" she squealed. "Get ready!" She waited a moment. "Now!"

"Zack Morris!" Alex cried, jumping right in front of Zack as he passed the stairwell.

Zack stopped, watching warily as Alex started to unbutton her overcoat.

"I have a singing telegram for you!" she announced, whipping open her coat to reveal a sexy, black silk dress. Quickly she tossed the coat to Kelly, slipping on a black beret at the same time.

"When I spy on a guy," she sang, hammering out the beat with shiny black tap shoes, "it's usually because he caught my eye. But sometimes it's because I just wanna be friends!" Tap, tap, tap, tap! "So what can I do? I'm just trying to get through, to make amends with you," she crooned, circling Zack slinkily and batting her eyelashes. "Zach-areeee! So please, please, I'm down on my knees!"

Alex dropped to her knees and slid toward Zack on the slick, hardwood floor. Then she clasped her arms around his legs dramatically. "Won'tcha, won'tcha, give the girls just one more chance!" she

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sang, belting out the last line in a crescendo that brought a thunder of applause from the students who'd gathered around to watch.

Then, as part of the grand finale, Alex flung her body to the floor and heaved a dramatic sob.

"Marry the woman!" someone called out.

"Okay, you're forgiven," Zack said with a grin. He bent down and helped Alex to her feet. "Hey," he said suggestively. "Are you and Slater still broken up?"

"Careful, Zack," said Kelly, stepping forward with a laugh. "I think you have enough girl problems without taking on Alex."

Zack smiled. "You know I was only kidding. So, Kelly, I take it Alex was apologizing for you, too?"

"Right," said Alex. "Kelly wrote the song."

"I hope it didn't sound too much like an old Bayside cheer."

"It was terrific," Zack said, giving each girl a kiss on the cheek. "I was flattered and entertained!"

Suddenly, Mike Rogers strode out from the crowd. "I'd like to throw in my own apology, if I can. I was snooping around just as much as these guys—but only out of concern."

Zack gripped his hand. "Apology accepted! Now, let's see. With your apologies out of the way, that leaves only . . . um, Leslie Burke! So I guess I'll be moving back into the suite really soon. Screech

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let it slip that she feels awfully bad about the whole thing. I bet she's planning on a very personal, very intimate apology."

Kelly, Alex, and Mike shifted awkwardly, looking down at the ground.

"What?" said Zack. "It isn't going to be personal? Is she throwing a party? Renting a blimp? What?"

Finally, Kelly spoke up. "Zack, we really do want you to move back into the suite. But you should know that Leslie's not going to apologize. She thinks you're to blame for everything." Kelly put her hand on his shoulder. "But once you come back . . ."

"Forget it, Kelly," Zack scowled, brushing her hand away. "I'm not going where I'm not wanted. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to visit the business library!"

■ ■ ■

All that week, Slater had been thinking about Alex. What with all the apologies to Zack going on, Alex's acting schedule, and Slater's wrestling matches, they had never gotten around to really talking. But Slater sensed a definite warming trend in their relationship. So, Friday afternoon after work, Slater decided to swing by the theater and try to hook up with her. Besides, Slater knew her film audition for Conrad Lerner should be just about over by then, and he wanted to know how it went.

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Slater was just turning the corner of the backstage alley when Alex and Conrad Lerner were walking out the door. Not wanting to interrupt—maybe Lerner was giving Alex his decision right then and there—Slater ducked behind the building to wait. Still, he couldn't resist peeking around to see what was going on.

"Thanks for all the help, Conrad," Alex was saying brightly as she stopped to button her coat.

"It's the least I can do," Conrad reached out, lifting Alex's chin in one hand, and planting a gentle kiss on her lips. "You're very special," he said quietly, but loud enough for Slater to hear. "I expect great things from you, Alex."

"Oh, Conrad!" Alex shook her head bashfully. "I hope I can live up to your expectations."

Just then a motorcycle pulled up next to Slater. Now what were they saying? Slater strained to hear above the roar of the motor, but couldn't make out anything except "dinner," "tonight," and "my place."

But that's enough for me, Slater decided, taking the long route back to the dorm to figure things out. First there was Bobby Fratello and the snake business, and now this. Obviously, Alex didn't want to get back together with him. The only thing he could do was try to forget her.

Slater was walking the last few steps to the dorm when Alex came rushing up. She was grinning

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from ear to ear, singing "There's No Business Like Show Business."

"Slater!" Alex said. "I had a *great* movie audition!" Brimming with excitement, she skipped the rest of the way to the suite, while Slater trailed behind. "Don't you want to ask me about it?" she continued when they were both in the common room. "Then we can move on to another good subject: you and me." Alex sidled up close to him.

"Well, I do have one question. What was going on with Conrad Lerner back by the theater?"

Alex drew back, puzzled. "You were there?" Slater had the habit of showing up at the strangest times!

"Yeah, I was there. And I saw that kiss."

"Kiss?" Alex thought a moment. "Oh, you mean when Conrad was saying good-bye. Oh, Slater, that was nothing. That's what people do in the theater. It's practically a tradition."

Slater crossed his arms. "And what about your date?"

Now Alex was getting annoyed. "You should bone up on your spying techniques, Agent 007," she said hotly. "For your information, Conrad was inviting me to his house for dinner. With his wife. And his children."

"Oh." Slater shifted uncomfortably. "So how'd it go, anyway?"

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"Tell you what," said Alex, jumping to her feet in a huff. "I'll reenact my exit scene."

Slater winced as Alex closed her bedroom door with a slam. *I knew that was coming*, he thought miserably.

chapter 15

Aaa . . . *choo!* Leslie reached for a tissue, then blew her nose. "I can't believe how sick I feel. This flu is really getting to me."

Leslie, Kelly, and Alex were all sitting on the floor of their bedroom, wearing bathrobes and comfy slippers and having some girl talk.

"You know what's bugging me?" said Alex. "Slater! Just when I thought things would work out between us, he goes and pulls a stunt that proves he's totally jealous!"

"I think you're being too tough on him," Leslie said, still sniffing a bit. "Think how hard it must be for Slater, having to deal with all your friends, all your theater traditions, and especially all those onstage kisses."

"And I think you're being too tough on Zack," Alex snapped.

Achoo! Leslie pulled another tissue out of the box.

"I'm sorry," said Alex. "You probably don't want to hear that when you're feeling so lousy."

"You need to get some rest, Leslie." Kelly pulled

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her stuffed bear from her bed and gave it a hug. "But Alex is right. Maybe you ought to talk to Zack and get everything sorted out."

Leslie's face was grim. "I've heard all I need to hear. I guess it was inevitable. As soon as a guy finds out about my family's money, his eyes turn a distinct shade of dollar green. We didn't even spend much time together. Zack was always studying!" Leslie sighed. "There was that one romantic dinner. But even that was just public relations, until he nailed down that job with Daddy."

"Are you sure about that?" Alex asked. "Leslie, did it ever occur to you that maybe Zack just wants a good job and was doing everything he could to make sure he got it?"

"Yeah, Les," Kelly put in. "After all—and don't take this the wrong way—we're not all independently wealthy."

"And how often has Zack had an opportunity like the one your dad's offering?" Alex continued. "Maybe he's just trying to cover all the angles."

Leslie let it all sink in, then shook her head sadly. "I'm sick of guys covering all the angles," she said in a hushed voice. "I want someone who plays it straight."

□ □ □

Zack woke up just after midnight. He'd been dreaming that he was the head of a major corpora-

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tion—and it was a nightmare. Chief Financial Officer Screech Powers had just run into his office to tell him that Phil Skylark had embezzled all the corporate funds. The company was broke. Then Screech disappeared, and the phone was ringing. It was Zack's wife. "Honey," said a voice that sounded just like Leslie's. "I wanted to tell you I'm leaving you forever, and I'm taking our five lovely daughters with me."

"Oh, Leslie, Leslie, Leslie," Zack moaned, wide awake. "I miss you." He missed the whole suite, in fact—his bed, his friends, . . . everything.

□ □ □

At exactly 12:02 A.M., Leslie sat up with a start. She thought she heard someone calling, "Leslie, Leslie, Leslie." Was she dreaming? For one crazy moment, she thought it was Zack, but . . .

Anyway, what difference did it make? She was up now, feeling sick, and she knew she wouldn't be able to fall back to sleep.

Turning her pillow over to the fresh side, Leslie sighed. What was she going to do? She was miserable. At first, she'd just been mad—mad at Zack, and mad that all her suitemates wanted him back. But then, when she'd given it more thought, she could actually understand why. True, Zack had lied to her and schemed. But Kelly, Slater, and Screech had been friends with him for years. Best friends.

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Besides, even Leslie could admit it wasn't much fun without him. And the only thing keeping him away was her.

Suddenly, Leslie started to wheeze and cough. Reaching for her box of tissues, she made a decision. "It's the right thing to do," she told herself. "I'll just tell everyone tomorrow."

Leslie was moving out.

■ ■ ■

Early the next morning, everyone was grouped around the kitchen counter eating breakfast.

Leslie gave a little cough and tried to blow her stuffed nose. "Can you pass the shoes?" she said.

"Shoes?" said Slater. "You want shoes with your toast?"

Screech laughed. "That's crazy. Everyone knows sneakers go better!" He reached into his bathrobe pocket and pulled out a stale bagel. "Is there an expiration date on this?"

"I want shoes," Leslie kept saying as she gestured at the orange juice container. "Shoes!"

"Huh?" said Slater.

"She means juice, you big, dumb oaf. And, if you had one ounce of sensitivity, you'd realize exactly what she was saying!" Alex reached around Slater to pass Leslie the container.

"Can we please not argue?" Kelly said, putting

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some Pop-Tarts into the toaster. "I think we're all a little tired and upset, and we should just take it easy."

"Kelly's right," Leslie said, trying to keep her voice steady. "I want to remember my last days in the suite as happy ones."

"What?" everyone said at once.

"I'm thinking of getting my own apartment," she admitted.

"Are you for real?" said Alex, distraught. "I didn't think freshmen were allowed to live off campus."

"You just have to petition. I don't think I'd have any trouble getting approved. There's a colonial-style building a block north of campus that I've always liked."

"The one by Gelson's Market? That's where I got this bagel," said Screech, dropping it into the garbage.

"That's the one. I just happened to notice a For Rent sign out front when I was coming back from the store yesterday."

Slater rubbed the back of his neck. "Are you sure you're not overreacting to everything?"

Leslie coughed again. "No, I'm not sure. And I'm not really feeling up to moving, either, so I'll have to wait a few days, anyway."

"Wait more than a few days!" Screech cried, suddenly realizing how upset Zack would be with the

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news. "Wait a month. Wait a year. I'll do anything to convince you. I'll stick to you like glue. I'll . . . hey, Kel, is that a brown sugar cinnamon Pop-Tart?"

■ ■ ■

While his old suitemates were eating breakfast, Zack was already dressed and on his way to the golf course. *This is it*, Zack thought. *The moment we've all been waiting for.* He was getting together with Mr. Burke, and Zack had a feeling this was going to be his make-or-break meeting. He'd find out today whether he was going to be the new intern. "Or maybe," Zack muttered, "I'll keep my former titles: Old Boyfriend, Scheming Fool, . . . whatever fits best."

Meanwhile, back at the suite, the girls were watching TV while Slater did the dishes and Screech swept the floor. Every Saturday, the girls and guys took turns cooking and washing dishes. And even though Screech had tried to say it wasn't fair—this week there were only two guys to do the dirty work—no one seemed to care.

Alex brought over a dirty cup from the coffee table and handed it to Slater. As he took it from her, their fingers touched, and Alex felt a tingle. Suddenly, with Leslie moving out and everything falling apart, patching things up with Slater seemed a top priority.

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"I'm sorry I called you a big, dumb oaf before," she said.

"And I'm sorry I've been so jealous."

"You know, I'm starting to understand. It's not easy watching the person you lo-o—" Alex stuttered. "I mean, like, getting close to someone else. Even if it is onstage. I saw you talking to a girl in English class the other day, and I was feeling pretty jealous myself."

"I feel like such a jerk about everything, Alex," Slater said, moving toward her. "I promise I'll try to understand what being in the theater is really like."

Alex leaned over and kissed him softly. "And I'll try to understand what you're going through. Maybe I should go to your wrestling matches. I bet I don't have a clue about your athletic world. It's like we're on completely different wavelengths. Each one of us has a different way of looking at things."

"Okay." Slater put his arms around her in a bear hug. "But the first thing you'll have to learn about wrestling is the holds."

"One couple down, one to go," Screech said, hanging up his dish towel.

He walked over to the coffee table, picked up the remote, and started flipping through the channels.

"Hey, look at this," Kelly said, pointing to the screen. "They've got *Meet Me in St. Louis* on the 'Morning Musical.' I love this movie."

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"Really?" Leslie leaned forward, forgetting for the moment how sick she felt. "That's the movie Zack and I saw the other night at the Roxy."

"This is the crucial part," Kelly said, watching closely. "All Papa thinks about is business, because he has to support his family and keep their social standing. But all Judy Garland really wants is the boy next door."

As everyone watched the scene unfold, something began to dawn on Leslie. The movie plot . . . what Alex was saying about people from two different worlds misunderstanding each other . . . everything came together. When she'd gone on about how she wanted an expensive Victorian house that night at the Roxy, there had been a bewildered look on Zack's face that she hadn't quite understood. And she never got to tell him that her uncle who rebuilt all those houses wasn't rich—it was what he did for a living. Surely Zack hadn't mistaken her comments and assumed he'd have to get rich to afford . . .

"Oh, my gosh," Leslie said. "I'll bet he thinks . . ."

"Shhhh!" Kelly cautioned. "Watch this."

The family in the movie was gathering around the piano getting ready to sing one of Leslie's favorite songs, "You and I." Leslie smiled. Their troubles were being smoothed out, and with any luck, so would hers and Zack's. *Achoo!* Now all she had to do was find him!

chapter 16

The sun was beating down on Zack's back, and he'd just about had it with golf.

"Ready for the last hole?" Mr. Burke called out to him.

Zack nodded. This time out, he and Mr. Burke were playing alone, and Zack had thought Mr. Burke would say something about the internship right away . . . or at least by the seventeenth hole. Instead, he'd barely said anything at all. He'd just been concentrating on each and every swing—Zack's included—and Zack was growing more and more nervous.

Now here they were on the eighteenth green. The match was neck and neck, and it was Zack's turn to putt. Mr. Burke had already sunk the ball, which put him one stroke ahead of Zack for the round. If Zack made the shot he was busy sizing up, the round—and the game—would be a tie.

"So how about a little side bet?" Zack suggested, winking at Mr. Burke the same way he'd winked at Zack before. Zack hoped he sounded cool and busi-

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nesslike, not scared and jittery. "Let's say if I hit this one, the summer internship is a cinch, no matter what."

The millionaire paused, then nodded his head slowly. "Okay, that's fine. And what if you don't hit it?"

"Breakfast at Arpeggio's, on me."

"You have a deal," said Mr. Burke.

Zack studied the pattern of the grass. He bent over his putt, trying to concentrate. If he made this shot, he had the job, even if Leslie told "Daddy" about their falling out. But after everything that had happened, did he still want it? If this was the kind of pressure he felt before he even started working, what would the actual job be like? And would he want it if he didn't have Leslie? Wasn't she the reason he was going through all of this?

"What was that?" asked Mr. Burke.

Uh-oh. Did I say all that out loud? Zack wondered. "Oh, nothing, just talking to myself," Zack said, flashing a nervous grin. He bent over his putt and concentrated. Taking a deep breath, he settled back in, then slowly pulled back his putter.

"Zack! We need to talk!"

Whack! Was that Leslie? Shaken by the interruption, Zack missed the stroke, and sent the ball rushing past the hole and off the green.

"Leslie!" exclaimed her father. "Where's your golf etiquette? And what are you doing here?"

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"Trying to settle a misunderstanding before it's too late, Daddy." Leslie suddenly started to sneeze and couldn't seem to stop.

Zack stood there, not knowing what to do, while Mr. Burke rushed over with a big handkerchief. "Here," he said. "You must have the flu. You should be home in bed."

"Not until I talk things over with Zack," Leslie said stubbornly. She stepped across the green to take Zack's arm.

"Zack, did you get the idea after we saw *Meet Me in St. Louis* that I was set on living in a big, fancy house, giving high-society parties all the time?"

"Well, sure. That stuff about big Victorian homes and living a certain life-style . . ."

"I was talking about their *manners*, Zack!"

"But you were talking about how the father supports the whole family, how the woman stays home. You made it seem like that was what you wanted."

Leslie smiled. "I can see why you'd think that, considering the conversation. But I was talking about support—like the way Daddy was just making sure I take care of myself. And the woman staying home? If that's what I wanted, why would I be in college?"

"Really, Zack, I didn't care about the family's money or their standing in society. I cared about their feelings. The way they lived—not how much money they had. If I cared so much about that other stuff, do you think I'd be living in a dorm?"

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"I guess not," Zack said doubtfully.

Leslie put her arms around him. "If I didn't feel a sneeze coming on, Zack Morris, I'd kiss you right here and now. I can't believe how much trouble you went to for me!"

Zack grinned, feeling like an enormous burden had been lifted from his shoulders. He and Leslie were finally on the right track. And as far as the summer internship went, well, he lost out on that when he missed the shot.

Zack looked at Mr. Burke. The man's arms were crossed, and he was frowning. "Does this have anything to do with the summer job?" he asked.

"Not anymore, sir," Zack said, grinning. "Besides, I blew it, didn't I? You won the game."

"True." Mr. Burke nodded. "But if you want the job, it's still yours, son."

"What?"

"You always had the job. You're the first fellow Leslie's ever brought around that I liked from the beginning. I was just keeping you in suspense so we could keep up these golf games. They've been very interesting."

Mr. Burke paused a moment and shook his head. "Of course, you were trying far too hard with all that overblown business talk. And your ineptitude with stocks! Oh, my."

"What do you mean, ineptitude?" Zack could

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barely believe what he was hearing. He hadn't fooled Mr. Burke one bit!

"I was more of a schemer when I was your age than you'll ever *think* about being," the millionaire explained, putting his arm around his daughter. "So don't think you can pull a fast one on me. Now, if you're feeling up to it, Leslie, let's all go for breakfast. Sounds to me like there's a story I should hear."

"Oh, and, Zack, I believe this is your treat?"

■ ■ ■

For the rest of the day, Zack took care of Leslie—making her tea, bringing her orange juice, making sure she rested regularly. By the time it grew dark, Leslie felt much better, and she was able to watch TV in the common room.

"You know, Zack," she said, turning to him with a smile. "You've been so sweet this whole day. Taking care of me and everything. It really proves you'd support me—in the best way possible. But when *you* get sick," she added playfully, "call a doctor."

"Very funny, Leslie. Joke all you want, but I know what you'd really do. There you were, practically on your deathbed, running around a golf course trying to explain things so *I'd* feel better."

Just then Alex and Slater came into the suite carrying enough pizza for a small army.

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"Anybody hungry?" asked Slater.

"Anybody want his blanket, pillow, and clothes?" Screech put in, as he and Kelly lugged in all of Zack's stuff. Zack leaped up to give everybody hugs. "Hey! Does this mean we're all back together?"

"Well, that depends." Alex looked at Leslie. "Are we?"

"Oh," said Leslie, laughing. "With all the excitement I forgot about my apartment."

"Apartment?" Zack sounded confused.

"Never mind," Leslie said, getting off the couch. "We *are* all back together. And do you know, I really feel like I can chow down on some of that pizza."

Kelly reached for the box. "Well, you must be feeling better then."

Everybody was getting the plates, drinks, and napkins together when Mike Rogers stuck his head in the doorway.

"Oh," said Mike, "I don't want to interrupt. I just wanted to find out what's been happening here."

Quickly, Zack explained everything. "That's terrific," Mike said. "But I have one more question: How did your audition turn out, Alex? Did you get the movie role?"

Alex shook her head sadly. "The producer gave the part to his girlfriend, do you believe it?"

"Yeah," Kelly added. "And those roles for Leslie and me didn't work out, either."

Smiling proudly, Slater put his arm around Alex.

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"But there's good news, too. Conrad absolutely promised Alex she could be in his next film."

"Great! What's it called?"

"*Attack of the Radioactive Sea Monkeys*," Alex answered, stars in her eyes. "And he says this one will be a lot better. It's an original script!"

"Can't wait," Mike replied. "'Night, guys. Oh, Screech, are we on for tomorrow? I'd like to go over those investment pie charts."

"Sure thing, Mike." Screech handed him a pizza box. "Here, take a pie and get started."

"Glad to see everything's back to normal around here," Mike said, shaking his head as he left.

The six friends looked at one another and laughed.

"I'm stuffed," Screech announced fifteen minutes later, standing up and stretching. "I think I'll call it a night. And if Slater doesn't snore too loud, I'm sure I'll sleep like a baby."

Kelly stood up, too. Looking at Leslie and Zack together gave her a little pang, but that was all. More than anything else, she was glad everyone was friends again. "Good-night, guys," she said, heading for the bedroom.

Alex and Slater moved closer together. "Thanks for seeing my point of view about the movie role." Alex gave Slater a smooch on the lips, then scrambled to her feet. "See you tomorrow."

"Can't wait," Slater said with a smile. He turned

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to Zack and Leslie. "You know, there might be something to this acting business. Conrad said he might even have a part for me."

"I can imagine," Zack replied. "Good sea monkeys are hard to find."

Slater feigned a swing at Zack, but the preppie was too quick. "I missed? I must be exhausted. Good-night, you two."

"Looks like it's just you and me, kid," Zack said to Leslie when they were alone.

"Imagine that. Me and the boy next door. I'd ask you to go to Mama's Pizza with me, but after all this food it might be a little anticlimactic, don't you think?"

"I could walk you to your door at least."

"All right, sir. You may."

Arm in arm, they strolled to the girls' bedroom door. Then Leslie put her arms around Zack's neck. Smiling hesitantly, she tilted her head and kissed him on the lips.

"Sure you don't want more pizza?" Zack asked softly. "Suddenly I'm not so tired."

Leslie grinned, but she gently pushed Zack away. "There's no rush," she whispered. "That's another thing I liked about that movie. Nobody was in a hurry back then. They took their time."

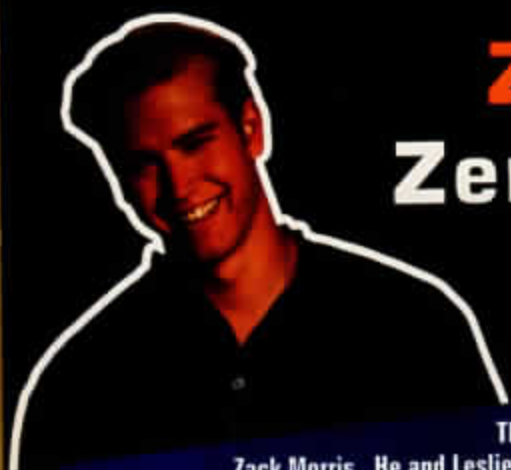
Curses, foiled again! Zack nodded his head, anyway. He guessed he understood. "Well, you know where to find me."

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"Right next door," Leslie said as she drifted into her room. "Sweet dreams, Zack."

When the door clicked shut, Zack looked around the common room. It was good to be home. Then he noticed a bunch of business books stacked in one corner. At least three of them hadn't even been cracked open. Zack stepped over, picked one up, and plopped down on the couch. But a second later, a different book—his chemistry textbook—caught his eye. Zack reached over and pulled it out.

"Why is it," he said, sitting back on the couch and beginning to read, "that every time you get in too big of a hurry to do something, you always end up hustling to catch up?"



Zack Zeroes In

Things are looking up for Zack Morris. He and Leslie are getting closer by the day, and when her father comes to campus for a visit, he takes a liking to the young man from Palisades.

But when Mr. Burke casually mentions that Zack might have a shot at a summer internship, Zack goes too far. He completely blows off his schoolwork and tunes into every business book, magazine, and video he can find.

Meanwhile, Alex might get the acting break of a lifetime. A Hollywood director is actually talking about giving her a small part in his upcoming film! But the steamy love scenes she's been playing in acting class have created some serious tension between her and Slater.

Will Zack ruin his chance for a college degree? Will Slater and Alex's relationship survive? Find out when you read *Zack Zeroes In*, the terrific new novel about "Saved by the Bell's" college clan.

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